LET NOT MAN PUT ASUNDER

BASIL KING

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A Vitagraph Production. *Let Not Man Put Asunder.*

LOU TELLEGEN AS LECHMERE AND HELEN D'ALGY AS HIS WIFE, FELICIA.

LET NOT MAN PUT ASUNDER

A NOVEL

BY

BASIL KING

AUTHOR OF

THE INNER SHRINE,
THE WILD OLIVE, ETC.

" For it so falls out.
That what we have we prize not to the worth,
Whiles we enjoy it ; but being lack'k and lost.
Why, then we rack the value ; then we find
The virtue, that possession would not show us
While it was ours."

—MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

ILLUSTRATED WITH SCENES
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Let Not Man Put Asunder

CHAPTER I

As Petrina entered the room she was reading a letter.

"It must be interesting," thought Mrs. Faneuil, looking up from the paper, "she is so absorbed."

"Good-morning, Petrina."

"Good-morning, mamma," the girl responded, absently. She kissed her stepmother, and then took her place at the breakfast-table.

"Any news?" Mrs. Faneuil asked, as she began to pour the coffee.

"Yes. I have a letter from Emmy de Bohun."

"With the latest intelligence from the seat of war, I suppose," said Mrs. Faneuil, passing Petrina her cup.

"Active hostilities seem to be suspended for the moment."

"It is only a truce, I presume."

"Apparently the strife is passing into another phase," said Petrina, helping herself to honey. "She and Sir Humphrey have separated."

"That's bad news. Their union was so entertaining. There was a drawing-room comedy air about the life at Orpington Park which we shall miss in our future visits to England. One felt there as if one was not only at the theatre, but on the stage."

"But I never thought it would come to this."

"I never thought it would come to anything else. A husband and wife who protest that they don't love each other are going in one sure direction."

"But it seemed in fun."

"A sort of fun that is likely to turn into earnest."

"But Emmy was fond of him—"

"Once, undoubtedly; and he of her. But the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in have choked their love. It has not become precisely unfruitful, for they have three children. Emmy doesn't say what is to become of them in the dividing of the inheritance?"

"Yes, she does. Here is what she writes: 'I have deferred this step, dear Petrina, until Tristram should be old enough to go to Eton. That takes care of him; for what with school and college, and then the army or the navy, a boy has no need of a home after he has reached Tristram's age. Hippolyta is going to her grandmother. Of course I shall miss her, but the dowager is wild to have her. Then she is such a strange girl! She doesn't understand me, and now that she is seventeen she begins to act for herself in a way which puzzles me. The baby I mean to keep, at least for the present—that is, if Humphrey won't take him. He threatens to do so, and, if he insists, I shall let him. He has already broken my heart. One sorrow more or less in such a load as mine would count for little.'"

"With most people a baby counts for a good deal," said Mrs. Faneuil, dryly.

"Emmy never had much of the maternal sense."

"She never had much sense of any kind."

"She is certainly very clever, mamma."

"Clever? Yes, perhaps. But cleverness and common-sense are two very different things, my dear."

Petrina let the subject drop for a while, and went on with her breakfast in silence.

"It is very annoying to us," she said at last, "that this should happen now."

"Why annoying? and why now?" asked Mrs. Faneuil, as she tapped her egg with a spoon.

"Because," said Petrina, calmly, "I am going to marry Emmy's brother."

Mrs. Faneuil dropped her spoon with a little gasp.

"Petrina!"

"Yes, mother. I have quite made up my mind. And I detest separations and divorces. They are in such bad taste."

"You are going to marry Henry Vassall? Is that what you mean?"

"That is what I mean, mamma. I see no great reason for your surprise."

"I am certainly obliged to you for taking me into your confidence before—before the match came off."

"Don't be vexed. You are the first to know. I have never spoken to any one about it—not even to him."

"Not even to him? Do you mean to say that he has not yet—?"

"No, not yet; but of course I see it coming."

"You seem very sure. Isn't it possible you may be mistaken?"

"Oh, mamma, you talk as if you never had been young. Don't you suppose that at the age of twenty-three, and with all my experience, I cannot read the signs of the times?"

"I had forgotten that you were so astute."

"It isn't astuteness, it is only instinct."

"Everybody would say you were making a very bad match."

"But I am not marrying to please everybody. I find it sufficiently hard to please myself."

"True," said Mrs. Faneuil, and again for a few minutes both were silent.

They were in the large bow-fronted dining-room at Faneuil Hill. Before them stretched a wide prospect of woodland, lake, and mountain. As one gazed outward one thought of the Tyrol, of the Schwartzwald, or of the English lakes; but one knew that such purity of air, such height of sky, such virgin freshness of forest life and landscape were essentially of New Hampshire.

Ashuelot is not in the White Mountains; it is among those numberless, unnamed hills that ripple away from the foot of Mount Majestic, and form that corner of New Hampshire thrust in between Massachusetts and Vermont. When Petrina's grandfather had bought the hill, to which the country people had given his name, Ashuelot was a township of widely scattered farmers, sturdily trying to wring a living out of the flinty soil. But among the New Hampshire hills Mother Erda is in one of her capricious moods. She is ready to charm man with her beauty, but not to give him bread. She subjects him to her own spell, but will not bend to his.

"These are not the wooers whom I seek," she seemed to say, as the patient toilers flung themselves, year after year, against her pitiless breast. "There are other lands for them to till. Let them go elsewhere. It is not for these that I have come up from the formless void and waited through centuries of calm."

"Lo, this one is mine!" she might have cried when, sixty years before Petrina's birth, young Peter Faneuil, after breaking through the thicket, first came out upon the hill that from his very feet swept downward to the lower landscape, as some great headland sweeps towards the sea.

"Glorious God!" the young man had gasped, his breath caught, his heart startled, by the sudden splen dor of the vision.

Far below, at the foot of the great wooded bluff on which he stood, a lake, irregular in form, indented in shore-line, and fringed by the forest, lay sparkling in unspeakable purity. To the south the low hills rose singly, brokenly, each trying to climb higher than the last, till, with one mighty heave, Majestic raised his gigantic shoulder, wooded right up to its highest granite ridge. To the west and to the north the billowy hills rolled onward into the horizon — tier rising beyond tier, chain interlacing chain, crest soaring above crest, valley traversing valley, and glen springing out of gorge. Here and there, held in the folds of loving hills, little lakes glinted with the glimmer of silver; while unseen rivulets could be heard forcing their way through fern and over crags on their long journey to the sea. High above, the noonday summer sun had dispelled every trace of cloud from the sky, every shred of vapor from the mountain-side, every veil of haze from the serried ranks of hills; the far seemed near; the near seemed at one's feet; but no brightness of light nor closeness of scrutiny could make the primal freshness of that view less inviolably pure.

Peter Faneuil was a young Boston merchant, stal-wart, stolid, and a Puritan to the heart's core; but there was in him some strain other than that of aptness for the counting-house. As he stood with feasting eyes, dilating nostrils, and spirit exulting in the sight of earth and sky, he lifted his arms heavenward and cried aloud, out into the reaches of that vast solitude:

"Glorious God! O glorious God!"

There was no response but in the myriad voices of forest life; but Mother Erda—she who had been pres-

ent when Titanic forces first flung up those hills out of the world's abysmal womb—she who had hardened them into beauty, clothed them with tree and fern and flower, and waited for the eyes of man—might well have cried: "Lo, this one at last is mine! This is no delver. This is no reaper. This is no dullard seeking for bread and finding a stone. This is my lover for whom I have waited and to whom I will reveal myself. He is the first-fruits. After centuries that man cannot count he has come, and others will follow in his footsteps."

So Peter Faneuil bought the hill, the country people wondering why. From time to time in after-life he found his way back again to the spot where his heart had first leaped at the call of Nature. It was his dream to make himself a home on this bold inland bluff; but, like David with the Temple, that task was for his son and not for him.

The next Peter Faneuil had built the large, square brick house, to which his second wife had given a touch of modern luxury and beauty. This was before the days of pretty wooden cottages perched on every rocky cape or pleasant country knoll. It was before the days when every prosperous citizen thought it necessary to have not only a house for work, but also one for play. There was nothing bizarre about the plain brick dwelling on Faneuil Hill. It was simple, solid, and spacious, built as a place to live in, and not merely as a shelter from the summer's heat or as a refuge from a life of labor.

It was the second Mrs. Faneuil, now at breakfast with Petrina, whose taste had clothed the bare brick walls with climbing vines and relieved the monotonous lines with balconies, bow-windows, and verandas. The result was a loss of stately New England simplicity,

but a gain in picturesque effect. As one looked at the old house in its new aspect one felt the existence of a change not only in taste but in manner of life. Simplicity had yielded to complexity, severity to elaboration. The New England foundation was still there, but much that was new had been built thereon. The spirit which had urged the Bradfords out of England and the Faneuils out of France was still alive, but grown sophisticated and self-conscious; not less eager and morally ambitious, but seeking its ideals in more daring ways. Between the Faneuil Hill of the moment and that of thirty years before there was the same difference of life and thought and spiritual standards as between Petrina and the father who had built the house, or the grandfather who had first stood upon the spot, or any other of the line of quiet Boston merchants from whom she sprang.

The same difference was manifest in all the township of Ashuelot. Great Erda had had her way. The delver and the reaper had gone. Their sons were winning among men — in law, commerce, and finance — the living they could not wring from the New Hampshire hills where they were born. Their places had been taken by those who had come, like young Peter Faneuil, to seek from Nature not her substance but her soul. Little by little Ashuelot had been discovered by the rich, the tired, the leisured, and the lovers of the clean, cool woods, the wine-like air, and the green perpetual hills. The pretty wooden cottage was now everywhere; it was of every size and form and degree of beauty, from hut to hall, from Doric palace to Italian villa, from colonial mansion to the many-gabled, many-columned, many-colored, rambling dwelling of the style that architects call Queen Anne.

All this was evident from the semi-open room where

Petrina and her stepmother sat at breakfast. Their little table was placed in a large bow-shaped embrasure, which Mrs. Faneuil had so cleverly contrived that all the lower part of the great window could be lifted upward. In fine weather they could thus breakfast and lunch in the open air. A larger table held the centre of the room; and the walls were hung with fine old prints, brought back by Petrina's grandfather and great-grandfather from their European travels in the days when photographs were unknown. The table was spread with silver of the Georgian era, each piece engraved with the Faneuil arms. The porcelain was of Sèvres, part of the service presented to one of the Peter Faneuils when minister to France. In any other house these things would have been kept in cabinets as objects of beauty; but Petrina would be served only from the best. She would rather have them broken than not used, she said, with the recklessness of a young princess who has not yet learned to economize her heritage.

Mrs. Faneuil, in her capacity of stepmother, had made it a point, since Petrina's majority, to leave the girl as free as possible. "It was the secret of getting on with her," she said, and she was right.

"You must not think that I am opposed to your choice," she said, after a long pause, "but you will own that it is unexpected."

"The merely expected in one's selection of a husband would be rather dull," said Petrina, as she sipped her coffee.

"That is just what strikes me about Mr. Vassall."

"I find it one of his attractions. You may think him dull. I call him only unobtrusive. I should hate a man who was always putting himself in the foreground."

"You reserve that field for yourself."

"I should naturally want my proper place."

"Which would be in front, I presume."

"I like your sarcasm, mother dear. It helps one to see the weak joints in one's harness. But I don't want you to think me wholly selfish."

"No, of course not. Only independent."

"Only free to lead my own life according to my own ideas."

"After marriage as much as before?"

"More than before. A married woman is so much freer—"

"*C'est selon.* Your poor father didn't allow me much freedom."

Petrina shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"But that was in—" she began.

"The Dark Ages," said Mrs. Faneuil, promptly. "Yes, I know what you young people think—that you are wiser than the aged, and have more understanding than your teachers. You talk as if love and marriage were unknown things when you discovered them—as if you were the first that ever burst into that silent sea. Don't begin playing with fire, Petrina, my child; don't make rash experiments with gunpowder."

"And don't mix your metaphors, mamma."

"I shall if I please. Mixed metaphors are less dangerous than mixed ideas on grave subjects."

"But who thinks of danger? I don't see why the question should be raised."

"It raises itself, my dear. Even with the most unobtrusive man there are moments when he must be the head of his own household; and then all your theories of freedom—"

"I have no theories. In what I do I should never want to involve any one but myself."

"You would involve your husband, however."

"Naturally; but that would be his *raison d'être.*"

"And suppose Mr. Vassall saw things from another point of view?"

"One drives one's steed according to his temper, but one always guides him into the way in which one wants one's self to go."

"If that is your idea, Petrina, my child, stay single. Your steed, as you call him, is very likely to run away with you and smash the coach. What then?"

"Oh, then," Petrina laughed, "if one is not dead one scrambles to one's feet again, and begins retrospectively to enjoy the excitement."

"You are incorrigible."

"No, only frank. But, to change the subject slightly, may I ask if you had any other views for me, mamma?"

"I? *Jamais de la vie.* I should never venture to have views for you, Petrina. You have far too many of your own."

"Or hopes, then?"

"Hopes, perhaps."

"And may I inquire—who?"

"Never any one more than that nice Sir George Wallingford at Cannes."

"But I always told you it was out of the question."

"Yes, I know. Still I have never been above thinking that Lady Wallingford had a good deal of sonority. In case of widowhood it would be Petrina Lady Wallingford, which seems to suit your style. Then it gives me a chance, as mother-in-law to a title, which counts for something in a middle-aged woman's life. I have always secretly envied Mrs. Vassall her dignity as mother to a Lady de Bohun. But my hopes are all dashed now."

Mrs. Faneuil laughed, but Petrina looked serious.

"I could never marry abroad, mother. I am a New England woman through and through, and my roots are very deep in the soil. I dwell among mine own people. If your only objection to Mr. Vassall is that he is not a foreigner and hasn't a title—"

"I don't go so far as to object, Petrina. I limit myself to surprise. He is so far out of your own set."

"I should never choose a husband who was in it. Fancy living with a man who knew only the people you knew, and did only what you do yourself! As it is, he would have his sphere, which would not interfere with mine. He is a good rider, a good golfer, a good shot, and very popular in his clubs. He would have plenty of occupation even if he gave up his profession."

"But you would like to be seen with him sometimes?"

"Whenever mutually agreeable."

"That is kind," said Mrs. Faneuil, in her dry way. "But then he is so poor."

"Surely I have plenty. And think what it would mean to me if he were rich. I should have to live in his house, and adopt his habits, and accept his money, and be under a sort of obligation to please him."

"Which would naturally be out of the question. But I wonder how far he would share your ideas. He seems to me very conservative, while no one could call you that."

"But I should despise a man who was not conservative. An advanced woman is in the order of things; she is daring, original, piquante. But an advanced man! Oh, mother dear! I should ten thousand times rather be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever."

"How nicely you quote Scripture! It reminds me

that Mr. Vassall is very religious. But, of course, you might break him of that."

"I am not sure that I should want to. His religion seems to be part of him."

"That is, perhaps, true. And then religion is so tolerated now. Professor Pembury told me the other day that at Harvard it didn't count against a man, even in the best and most intellectual sets. I should only fear that if Mr. Vassall insisted on your going to his church—"

"I did go once."

"And—?"

"I was rather touched. It was last spring, when I first began to know him."

"Did he ask you to go?"

"No, but he seemed pleased when I told him I had gone."

"What a curious caprice on your part!"

"I wanted to get the range of his ideas. We had talked about a lot of other things, in which I could understand him. But here I seemed to be outside. In his religion he was in a world to which I had no key."

"And so finding the door open you went in."

"I looked in only. I was within the church, but outside the ideas."

"Yet you say you were touched?"

"Less by the religion than by his part in it. He seemed so simple and honest. One felt the presence of something not only sincere in his belief but fearless in his attitude towards the world."

"What a strange girl you are, Petrina! There are times when you seem to be so independent; and then suddenly you lapse into the conventional; I hesitate to say the commonplace."

"Say it, if you like, mamma. For me nothing is

commonplace that I choose to care for, nothing is conventional that I choose to do."

"And yet you cannot be without principles, Petrina."

"Certainly not. I have at least three."

"Really? So many! Would it be discreet to ask what they are?"

"First, to think what I please; second, to say what I please; third, to do what I please."

"Coming from any one else but you, the declaration would sound—"

"Odious," said Petrina. "I know."

"I was going to say selfish."

"I think my adjective is the better one."

"Selfish or odious as you will, you have the art of being either with good taste. You are inconsistent even there."

"I am not striving to be consistent. I am struggling only to keep free."

"And yet with this as your object you think of marrying a man like Henry Vassall."

"I think only of marrying the man I love."

"Then you love him? I was wondering whether the word would come."

"Certainly I love him; otherwise I should not think of marriage."

"Then how do you propose to keep so free?"

"I am not aware that the fact that we love each other involves his interference with my life, any more than mine with his."

"Isn't that a somewhat original view of the situation?"

"Perhaps. I don't know. In any case, it is mine."

For a few moments there was silence.

"If you were not so very independent," said Mrs. Faneuil, breaking the pause, "independent in means

and position as well as in character, I should attempt to give you some very strong advice."

"It would be useless, mother dear. I am not one of those natures who ever need advice, or who ever take it. You know that I don't say that through lack of affection."

"I know, dear child. And yet at moments like this I regret that I am not your own mother."

"I like the situation best as it is. If you were my own mother, I should feel obliged to yield in many things in which we are now each independent of the other. As it is, we are good friends, and yet we are both free."

There was another pause, which was also broken by Mrs. Faneuil.

"I think you said Mr. Vassall was coming to tea this afternoon?"

"Yes; he arrived at the inn last night. I wrote him that he might come. He has a friend with him, whom I said he could also bring."

"Who?"

"A Mr. Lechmere. One of the Brookline family."

"The only Brookline Lechmere now is Dick."

"That's his name. Do you know him? He lives abroad, I think."

"I've seen a good deal of him at one time and another."

"He's a great friend of Harry's. What is he like? Is he nice?"

"He's very good-looking, and very — how shall I say?—very mystical and *dix-septième siècle*. He looks like a Vandyke Charles I.; and you might easily ascribe to him all the virtues which the Royalist loved, as well as all the weaknesses the Puritans hated."

"That sounds rather interesting."

"Yes, he's interesting, if it is interesting to be like no one else. I should say his friendship might be rather dangerous—I mean in the sense in which it is dangerous to travel in an unknown land of which there are no maps and no guide-books, where there are plenty of spouting volcanoes and fathomless lakes, and nothing to lead anywhere. Dick is a compound of magnificent weakness and futile strength. When I knew him I never could be quite sure whether he was an apostate saint or a Tannhaüser seeking for redemption."

"Harry says he married badly."

"Yes—that Madame Felicia de Prony who made such a fiasco at the opera in New York last winter. She's a beautiful woman, and Dick was mad about her. At the time he married her, three or four years ago, people thought she was going to be another Patti. But I believe she is very delicate, and hasn't done much, after all. I heard her last season in London—you were at Orpington Park at the time. I thought her voice had gone off terribly, though she was still exquisitely pretty. She has one of those pure faces which would deceive the very elect. When I saw her it was just after her escapade with the Duc de Ruynes, for which Dick got his divorce. Poor fellow! I wonder if his experiences have changed him?"

"You will have a chance of judging this afternoon."

Petrina rose as she spoke and went out on the veranda.

She was very tall, and carried herself with an air of gentle command. Her long step gave to her movements something of almost feline gracefulness, emphasized by her soft, trailing robe.

Mrs. Faneuil, still seated at the table, took up again

the morning paper, but looked out at Petrina. The gaze of the calm eyes fixed upon the wooded side of Mount Majestic could just be seen.

"I wonder what is behind that mask?" the stepmother said to herself. "I wonder if any one will ever know?"

CHAPTER II

LATER in the day Mr. Dick Lechmere was asking himself the same question: "What is behind that mask?"

He and Petrina were together on the veranda. Tea was over, and Mrs. Faneuil had taken Vassall to a spot on the hill-side where the view was specially fine. Petrina and her guest sat beside the disordered tea-table, talking as people do who have frequented the same society, seen the same places, and done the same things. But there was already something more in their conversation. There was a note of sympathy, a sense of something held in common.

"This man," said Petrina to herself, "has sounded the depths and the heights of experience. His hand has swept *toute la lyre* of life. It is what I should like to do."

"What is behind that mask?" Lechmere kept asking silently. "Shall I ever know?"

For, looking at Petrina, he acknowledged that her face was not easy to read. It was not unexpressive, but it showed its expression rarely; it was mobile but inscrutable.

He knew women well; he had formed an almost scornful habit of classifying them at sight. Here, however, he felt himself checked. As he talked idly of his fishing trip to Canada with Vassall, he was secretly admiring the proud poise of Petrina's head, the pure oval of the countenance, the refinement of the small

features, and the rich, ivory tint of the complexion. The dark eyes, fringed with heavy black, curving lashes, looked at him as if with a gaze that meant something—but what he could not guess. The very smile, sweet and gentle as it was, seemed to him baffling and mysterious.

"The face is classical," he said to himself, "but less Greek than Egyptian. She is not Helen, but Cleopatra. No; rather she is Aïda."

Then a sudden memory seemed to change the current of his thoughts, for he turned away and gazed over the autumn-tinted landscape. Petrina was speaking, but he did not hear her. He saw another Aïda, not now amid the New Hampshire hills, but against the artificial background of the stage.

"*Non ti rivedro mai più—mai più,*" this Aïda sang.

"*Mai più—mai più,*" was the echo in Lechmere's heart.

Though the shadow on his face lasted but an instant, Petrina saw it.

"You live abroad the greater part of the time, I think?" she asked, for the sake of saying something.

"I don't live anywhere," he replied, smiling faintly. "I am rarely more than a month or two in any one place."

"Are you so fond of travelling, then?"

"No, I hate it. But I am a modern Wandering Jew. I must move on."

"Isn't that rather dreary?"

"No, because the new place always promises to be better than the old."

"And on arrival you find it—?"

"Worse; but then that is a reason for moving on again."

"And yet your Brookline place is so beautiful, they

tell me. If you were to settle down there for a little while, don't you think that in the end you would like that best?"

"One grows like the man in Kipling's poem—

> "'I must go, go, go away from here.
> On the other side the world I'm overdue.'

If I were to settle in Brookline, and live at the Meerstead, some reason would arise for starting off elsewhere."

"You find reasons, then? You don't act on mere caprice?"

"Under certain circumstances caprice is reason enough."

Petrina laughed.

"I like that," she said. "It requires so much courage to say it, here in New England."

"And yet to me it is only one manifestation of the New England spirit. For isn't caprice often an outlet for intensity? And isn't intensity the distinguishing quality that marks the true New-Englander out from among the rest of men?"

Lechmere's voice was deep, soft, and very pleasant to Petrina's ear. He spoke without enthusiasm, but without effort.

"I speak of the true New-Englanders," he went on, "of those who, like you and me, inherit the blood which founded Plymouth, Salem, and Boston. What stamps us is not our opinions, but the way in which we hold them; not the things we do, but the way in which we do them."

"You mean that our Puritan inheritance is not one of creed, but of temperament."

"Precisely. You don't believe as your ancestors

did any more than I; but what you do believe, you believe with the same fervid sense of belonging to the elect. You don't live for the same ends as they did; but what you do live for, you live for with the same eager determination to work your ideals out. You and I are no longer vexing our righteous souls with questions of Church government, but we are vexing them about something else—just as surely as Bradford ever did at Austerfield or Brewster at Scrooby."

"But if we are living for purely personal ends?"

"Then we are living with the same intensity. Intensity is the quality which, before every other, pervades all our joys and sorrows; it may be veiled; it may be hidden; it may be kept down under an exterior of petrified calm; but it is always there, a passion in the heart, in the conscience, in the thought, inspiring us to good or to evil as the case may be, but always driving us on. If we go right, we do it nobly; if we go wrong, it is as if urged to it by whips of fire."

"And if we keep going round and round the world as you do?"

"It is because we can't help it," Lechmere laughed. "It is because up there in Basset Lawe something was bred into the blood which makes it impossible that we should take things easily, or let our trials sit lightly on our lives."

"So that even caprice becomes a passion."

"So that there is no caprice. So that the same whips of fire which send Vassall there every day doggedly to his office, as though there were no such thing as pleasure, send me from land to land and from sea to sea, as though there were no such thing as rest. I wonder if you feel that?"

"I am asking questions," said Petrina with a light laugh, "not answering them."

"You don't want to show your hand," said Lechmere, feeling checked again.

"I have none. The cards have not yet been dealt me. A girl, even at twenty-three as I am—"

"Holds the pack and has the deal."

"But the deal depends upon the cut, and the cut upon the cutter."

"And the cutter," said Lechmere, a little bitterly, "depends upon nothing but the blindest chance. That is the hard part of this life. He may give his opponent all the trumps and know nothing of it till the hand is played."

"So that your advice would be—?"

"To keep out of the game."

"And yet you haven't done so."

"I have played and—lost."

"You haven't the air of the vanquished."

"It is the poor devil that goes humming and smiling away from the *salles-de-jeu* who shoots himself behind the first clump of cactus."

"But he has had the excitement," said Petrina, with a certain lifting of the head.

"That is her first confession," Lechmere thought. "Do you say that?" he asked aloud. "I had begun to think—but perhaps I ought not to say it."

"By all means. I shall not be offended."

"I had begun to think that you were one of those prudent modern women who will not risk the stakes they hold for fear of losing them."

"They keep out of the game. I understand that to be your counsel."

"A counsel given in haste, but not to be taken at leisure. In knocking about the world I see so many of my countrywomen who will not risk income and independence for higher joys."

"Considered merely as joys, income and independence are already thought to rank above the average. One can't have everything, and it is often best to keep the bone rather than try to seize the shadow."

"I don't believe you think so." Lechmere's tone was provocative.

"It is not a question of what I think, but of what is best for our poor, undefended sex. We never quite lose the sense that civilization has treated us somewhat badly. After nineteen centuries of the modern era we are not yet quite sure whether we are men's inferiors, superiors, or equals; and, whichever point of view we take, some one is ready to laugh us to scorn."

"So that safety lies in keeping one's income and independence unimpaired so long as one is lucky enough to have them?"

"Safety lies in living one's individual life with the least possible collision with any other life."

"But if the collision is inevitable?"

"In disentangling one's self and still going on one's way."

"Leaving the sinking ship to sink and the drowning men to drown?"

"You push the metaphor too far. When a woman is in danger it is more than she can do to save herself."

"Is that why women are growing so self-centred?"

"Our mothers and our grandmothers had all the daring of timidity. They committed themselves without question or condition to the care of some one else. This confidence was so little justified that what they gave into others' keeping women to-day prefer to reserve in their own. They find prudence better than protection."

"If men were half so cautious there would be no such thing as progress. Progress is the child of venture."

"Doubtless. But the woman has had to run with

the hare while the man has hunted with the hounds. It is not strange, therefore, that she should have developed an abnormal scent for danger."

"Which—?"

"Which has replaced the daring of timidity by the challenge of defiance."

"And the denial of duty."

"Yes, to some extent. Duty is one of the most misused words in the language. It is generally employed so as to mean what other people think we ought to do."

"Other people are often better judges than ourselves. They are more impartial."

"But less well-informed."

"It is the looker-on who sees most of the game."

"But not always the reasons for the play. One judges of that for one's self."

"One must go according to Hoyle."

"That is what I object to. I am not in this world to play Hoyle's game, but my own."

"But if you lose the tricks?"

"I maintain my individuality."

"That is likely to be hard on your partner."

"My partner must take care of himself," laughed Petrina.

"Some people," cried Vassall, who, sauntering up with Mrs. Faneuil, had caught the last few sentences—"some people would call that the feeble feminine sense of honor."

"And you?"

Petrina flashed on him a look of interest. It was clear that she cared to know his point of view.

"I am too wary to risk an opinion," said Vassall, offering her a great sheaf of golden-rod and Michaelmas daisies. "I let this act and these emblems speak for me."

"That means he is against us," Mrs. Faneuil cried. "If a man has anything good to say of women he is only too glad of the chance to prove himself a flatterer."

"With the flatterers there are often busy mockers, I have read," Petrina rejoined.

Then they talked on banteringly, but Petrina said nothing more. She had ceased to listen. She lay back in her long chair, letting her eyes wander from one speaker to another, and instinctively comparing the two men before her.

As she glanced at Lechmere, she recognized the justice of her stepmother's description. He did look like a Vandyke Charles I. There was the same noble forehead, the same large, gentle eyes, the same pointed beard, and the same upward-curving mustache which did not conceal the mobile, rather sensuous, mouth.

"He's not like other men," she thought. "Mamma was quite right. He *is* something of a Stuart. He has the Stuart dignity, the Stuart charm, and possibly the Stuart haplessness."

It was with unconscious relief that she turned from Lechmere to Vassall. However much she liked the complex, she preferred simplicity in men; and, as she looked over at the man of her choice, standing by Mrs. Faneuil in the grass, she felt, with satisfaction, that she could read him easily. Had she met him in Cairo, Constantinople, or St. Petersburg she would have known him to be of that special Anglo-Saxon type which is brought forth by New England, trained by Harvard, and indelibly stamped by Boston. Petrina passed over his fair but sun-browned good-looks and his rather negligent attire as circumstances of no importance; but she liked to observe his intellectual

forehead, his thoughtful eyes, his straight nose, and sensitive nostrils. These, she felt, were points by which you could judge a man. She might have considered the mouth too stubborn, only that it was nearly hidden by a long, fair mustache; but she was aware that the ascetic, clean-shaven cheek, and the square-set chin were marks of a character bound to fight and work, and not to tread the primrose path of dalliance. That was not quite what she wanted; but then she would have had less interest in finding a husband already perfect in the graces it would be her pleasure to impart. Petrina believed that the best plan in marriage was to take a man, more or less unformed, and mould him. She knew that Vassall had pursuits for which she did not care: he was much occupied with the improvement of municipal politics in America, and with prison reform all over the world; he even wrote articles and attended conferences in which these unfashionable subjects were treated seriously. She had no positive objection to that, but she found it unnecessary to the ends she had in view. She did not see him as other people did. He never appeared to her as a rising lawyer, or as a promising fellow who might take a high place in public life. He was only a nice-looking, well-bred, honest young man, who had somehow managed to touch her heart.

Moreover, she acknowledged him to be her equal, and her equals she found rare. She had long meant to marry, and to marry one of her own countrymen. She had declined already more than one decorative name and picturesque ancestral background in order to carry out this patriotic principle; but up to the present she had seen no one worthy to erase the Faneuil name, and spend the Faneuil money, and walk as prince-consort at her own left hand.

Petrina thought highly of herself as the last of her race. There had been Peter Faneuils almost as long as there had been American history. When, at her birth, her mother lay dying, and they told her father that the baby was a girl, he had said, "Call her Petrina, for there will never be another Peter Faneuil now." She bore the name with pride; she was conscious of representing something of her country's past; she took, in her own estimation, a high place in the little group (acknowledged an aristocracy in every land) of those whose houses have rendered conspicuous public services. Sole inheritor of wealth, sole possessor of a name, sole mistress of her freedom, Petrina felt herself to stand apart from other young women of her age and station. In society, in friendship, in marriage, it was her idea to choose rather than be chosen, and to honor rather than be honored. Thus in bestowing her heart on Vassall she had been urged not by any hasty or too strong emotion; she had selected like a young queen-regnant who deliberately chooses from among the eligible princes of the earth.

To Vassall the indications of her preference had come like something too lovely to be credible. He had stood in the extreme outer circle of her admirers, scarcely expecting to be distinguished in the crowd. There were so many other men whom she might naturally have noticed before him—richer, cleverer, handsomer men, men whom she met at the dinners to which he was rarely invited, and at the dances which it was seldom his taste to attend—that when she began to single him out he took her favors as the kindness of a princess to her courtier and no more. He told himself not to hope; he held himself back from lifting his glance too high. In his attitude towards her he was deferential, but detached; friendly, but not familiar. He was

anxious to protect his pride from humiliation as well as his heart from needless pain.

Little by little Petrina had shown him that neither need be feared. As winter waned and spring went by he loosed the check upon himself; he came nearer and was welcomed; he paid open court and was not disdained. Now he was in that happy stage in the race for love where his rivals were all behind him, and the goal was well in sight, though the crown was not yet won. He was, in short, just where Petrina's strategy had placed him, and where she had meant for months that he should be.

CHAPTER III

"YOU wouldn't expect me to congratulate you, old chap," Lechmere called from his room, where he was filling his pipe.

"Why so?" Vassall asked, absently.

He was seated sidewise on the balustrade of the balcony that connected his room at the inn with Lechmere's. Puffing softly at his cigarette, he was looking up at the great golden moon rising behind Mount Majestic. High above his point of view and across a wooded valley, now lying dark in the night shadow, he saw the lights of Faneuil Hill twinkle like a little group of stars.

At dinner Lechmere had talked much of Petrina. He had praised her and appraised her; he had criticised her style and analyzed her character; he had compared her with other women; and admitted his inability to put her into any of the classes in which he had tabulated them.

"She is a pagan Puritan," he had said, pursuing his favorite theme. "She has the Puritan zeal and the pagan lack of principle. She is the cosmopolitan New-Englander, at once strait-laced and unconventional. She has in her all the coldness of Boston, all the correctness of London, and all the impetuosity of Paris. She is frank, she is possibly loyal, and yet I doubt if she is a woman to be trusted."

"Go to the devil with your analysis," Vassall had exclaimed impatiently, as Lechmere kept the subject

up, even after they had settled down on the balcony to tobacco and green chartreuse.

Then, with a skilful question or two, Lechmere had probed his friend's hopes.

"Ho, ho, Harry, my boy! So that's the way the cat jumps, is it? Now I see the reason for this out-of-the-way journey into the fastnesses of New Hampshire. Siegfried has struggled through the thicket to find Brünhilde on the hill of fire. The lady is not asleep, though. She struck me as uncommonly wide awake."

"You will be struck in another way if you don't shut up," Vassall had said, a little nettled.

"Then I shall get out of harm's way," Lechmere had replied, going back into the room to fill his pipe.

In the silence that followed Vassall leaned back against a pilaster of the balcony and watched the rising moon. The light above the mountain made all the valley below seem very dark. The night was still. Now and then slight sounds were heard in the forest, and from far away, near the lake, came the maniacal, lonely laughter of a loon.

"You wouldn't expect me to congratulate you, old chap," persisted Lechmere, calling from the room.

"Why so?"

Vassall answered wearily. He would have been glad to let the subject drop.

"Because," said Lechmere, coming out and taking his seat again, "my conscience will not allow me to say that I approve when I don't."

"It's best, then, for our future relations that your opinion should not be asked."

"I give it spontaneously, old man. My eloquence is bubbling up within me, like a fountain that no power can dam."

"If your last word ends with an *N*, I can prove you wrong by—"

"Doing it yourself. Let it be *N* or *M*, then, as you please, so long as I deliver my soul."

"Let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

"I see you have been studying the marriage service. You will remember, then, that immediately before the words you have quoted there is a charge requiring any man who can show just cause why *N* and *M* may not be lawfully joined together to declare it."

"I remember that there is something of the sort."

"Then he would be no true friend who failed to show the impediment before things had gone too far?"

"I don't see what you are driving at, but go on."

"Therefore I stand here on this balcony, this lovely New Hampshire night, and forbid the banns. That is to say, I sit rather than stand, and object rather than forbid."

"On what ground?"

"On the ground that any man is mad who of his own voluntary act gives himself away in mind, body, income, liberty, and sometimes in very soul."

"Then your objection is not to my banns in particular, but to all banns in general?"

"To yours in particular, because they are yours. I don't want to see my old friend run his head into a halter out of which he can never wriggle without a good deal of choking. I've gone through that myself, you know. I should like to keep you out of it."

Vassall stirred uneasily. In the three months in which Lechmere and he had passed most of their leisure time together no reference had ever been made to that marriage and divorce whose details had been given in the press of two continents. Vassall had studiously

kept from any allusion to the subject; Lechmere had ignored it. Now both men grew silent—Vassall because he feared being indiscreet, Lechmere because his thought was already back in the life from which he had fled.

So they smoked on silently. The moon mounted higher in the sky, lighting up the valleys of the forest. The laughter ceased from the verandas of the inn, and soon the whole house sank into stillness. The lights on Faneuil Hill went out.

"It is growing late," said Vassall, moving from his perch on the balustrade. "I think I'll turn in."

"Don't go yet," said Lechmere. "It is too lovely a night for sleep. Besides, I want to yarn on a little bit."

Vassall said nothing, but lighted another cigarette and refilled his glass.

"You're a good sort, Harry," Lechmere went on. "You would let me give you advice and yet never say, 'Physician, heal thyself.'"

"I am willing that you should make my business yours, Dick, without insisting that yours shall be mine."

"I've often wondered, since we've been knocking about together, what you've thought of my life during the past three years."

"If you want me to criticise it, old man, I don't know that I can oblige you."

"No, I suppose you can't. And I'm not sure that criticism is what I want. I rather think it's counsel."

"I'm not much good at that. Counsel is generally so cheap—"

"And nasty; so easy to give and so hard to take; so stale and flat and unprofitable. I know all about that, and yet I should like to hear your ideas, none the less. I want a dose of good stiff Puritan severity to brace me up, and I don't know where else to look for it."

"Are you sure it isn't best to let sleeping dogs lie?"

A subtle change came over Lechmere.

"There is no sleeping dog in my life. There is only an untamed beast that is always trying to down me."

Vassall had the nervous discomfort of a reticent man who covers up his own wounds and dreads to look upon those of another. He was not unsympathetic, but he had the New England fear of being called upon for a show of emotion.

"You'd better think twice, Dick, before you speak of that," he said with constraint. "You will perhaps regret to-morrow what you may say to-night."

"Not with you."

Lechmere sat up straight and looked hard at Vassall through the moonlight.

"Did you ever see my wife?" he asked, abruptly.

"Yes," said Vassall, entering on the subject with reluctance.

"Where?"

"At Covent Garden; at the Metropolitan in New York; and when she first began to sing at the Opéra-Comique in Paris."

"What did you think of her?"

"I thought she sang well."

"Is that all?"

"I thought her pretty."

"Of course. But is that all?"

"No. Only I hardly know how to express the rest. I don't see why you are questioning me. She seemed to me extremely charming — extremely seductive, I ought to say."

"Didn't it strike you that a man could more easily go to the devil for her than for any one else in the world?"

"Perhaps so. I may have had some such feeling about her."

"In what rôles have you seen her?"

"Several times as Carmen."

"And—?"

"As Marguerite."

"Never as Aïda?"

"Yes, as Aïda, as Elisabeth, as Santuzza, as Eva in the 'Meistersinger,' as—as—I forget for the moment what else."

"Juliet?"

"Yes—Juliet."

"Did you ever hear anything on earth like her voice in the two duets—on the balcony and in the chamber?"

"Never."

"Doesn't the very memory make you thrill?"

"Yes, Dick," said Vassall, speaking now with greater freedom and conviction.

"And you have only heard it from the stalls. I have lived through it. We have not only sung the things together, but we've lived them together. You can imagine what it must be to me."

"I think I can, Dick."

"It was so real at the time—*la douce nuit d'amour*. The thought that that time is over isn't easy to bear."

"Are you sure it *is* over?"

"I don't know. That's what I want to ask you. My own life has become a riddle to me; and I have no clew at all to hers."

He sprang suddenly to his feet, and moved away to the end of the balcony. Vassall, who felt his frigidity melting, followed.

"I will do anything I can for you," he said.

"Thanks," Lechmere answered, quietly. "I want only to know which way to turn."

"Have you had no communication with her?" Vassall asked, "since the—the—?"

"Divorce? No—none. But I've seen her. If I had any lurking hope of taking up the past again it received its death-blow then. And yet I have a longing for—I don't know what."

"Did you seek her out? Or did you meet by accident?"

"It was last June, in London. I didn't know she was there. I have latterly avoided the great capitals where she has been singing, through fear of being bowled over by some weakness. I had come back from the East, and was only passing through London on my way to take the boat at Liverpool. I had but one night to spend, and I saw her announced for Aïda. I couldn't help it; I went."

"And then?"

"I found a box on the grand tier near the stage. I wanted to be conspicuous, to have her notice me. At first I thought she didn't. She came before the curtain, but gave me no glance of recognition. It was not until the act by the Nile, outside the temple, that I knew she had seen me. She was singing her air '*O Patria mia.*' Then suddenly, at the words '*Non ti rivedro mai più—mai più,*' she turned and looked at me. I knew what she meant. She sang with intention, and I understood. In spite of the pathos of the air and situation I knew her heart was hardened against me. '*Non ti rivedro mai più.*' That signified that she never meant to see me again. She seemed to say to me, 'If you have come here hoping either to frighten me or to win me back, you are wrong. You are nothing to me but a memory. I have outlived your time. I am happy now with some one else!' I waited, however, till the end of the act. I saw her come before the curtain with Rhadames and Amneris, but she looked no more my way. She smiled in response to the applause.

She bowed to the princess and nodded to some one on the other side of the house. I think she had forgotten me already."

"And that is all?"

"That is all. I haven't seen her since."

There was silence for a while, during which both men, standing side by side, smoked and reflected.

"What do you want me to do, old fellow?" Vassall asked at last.

"To advise me."

"But how? I know so little of the circumstances of your marriage and separation!"

"Of course. But I want to tell you. You know I've suffered, and now that I'm free you think I should be satisfied. No, I'm damned if I'm satisfied. And yet—"

"And yet you don't know what you want?"

"Listen, Harry. Sit down; smoke; drink; keep awake; you can sleep to-morrow. Give me an hour to-night for our old friendship's sake. You must see that beneath all this stolidity and *sang-froid* that I'm pretty nearly used up. If you can't help me, then—"

"Then what?"

"Then—but never mind that. That is a last resource, but it is always possible to find it."

"If you want me to help you," said Vassall, sitting down again, "you must let me treat you as a client."

"I ask nothing better, and I'm ready to pay you a jolly good fee."

"And if you're my client I must ask you, as I always do, to tell me the whole truth."

"The whole truth will be a big dose for your New England digestion."

"You needn't think of me. When it is too much to swallow I'll tell you to stop."

"What shall I do?

"Treat me as your lawyer, or your doctor, or your father-confessor; otherwise I can do nothing."

"Let me fill my pipe again."

Lechmere went back into his room. When he returned there was another subtle change in his manner. He took his seat again beside Vassall, and when he spoke it was quietly.

"It is curious," he began, "that I had never seen Felicia on the stage before having met her elsewhere. I had heard a great deal about her, of course. At Vienna I knew some men who were devotees of hers, and always formed a sort of *claque* when she sang. What they told me of her, what I heard in clubs and other places, gave me a prejudice against her."

"You may speak as plainly as you like, Dick," said Vassall, warningly. "But again let me remind you not to say to-night what you may regret to-morrow."

"Thanks, old chap. But unless I speak plainly you will never be able to advise me; and I need advice more than the drowning man needs a straw. I must have something to clutch at, otherwise I shall go under."

"All right," muttered Vassall. "But don't forget I warned you."

"I won't. Let me continue. It was not until I went to London for the season three years ago last spring that I ever saw her. I had been dining at your sister's, and there I met Chaillot, the big French barytone, who was so much about with Lady de Bohun that year. I hadn't seen Chaillot for a long time, and so, as we were both at the Savoy, we took the opportunity to walk home together. Arrived at the hotel, Chaillot asked me to his room. He was then preparing for his *première* as Escamillo, and we talked a good deal about it. By and by Chaillot sat down at the piano and began to

sing some of his airs. He was nervous, and afraid of making a fiasco. I think he mentioned to me that Mademoiselle de Prony, who was to be Carmen, was ill in the rooms below his own. Suddenly there was a light knock, and before Chaillot had time to speak the door was thrown open and Felicia de Prony herself stood there.

"'May I come in?' she asked, in English.

"She wore a sort of dressing-gown, all white lace and flounces. Her hair was hanging down, and her bare feet in slippers. Her maid was behind her.

"'*Mais tu es folle, Félicie, de venir comme cela chez moi,*' Chaillot cried.

"She only laughed and came in. Chaillot introduced me to her, and I may as well say here that for me it was what a Frenchman would call the *coup de foudre.* Felicia gave me only one look—but a look that did all the work. She was in one of her innocent moods. She was Marguerite in the garden, when she first detects her love for Faust. If you have seen her in the part—"

"Yes, I know."

"Well, that night she excelled herself. She was simple, ingenuous, appealing. She was too trustful even to know that her presence like that in Chaillot's room at a late hour of the—"

"Are you speaking satirically or not?"

"Not wholly, for while the mood lasted Felicia was as innocent as she seemed to be. She was acting, but she was acting in earnest. She was acting because she can do nothing else. Life with her is always some vein of comedy or tragedy. She is Ophelia, or Juliet, or Elisabeth, or Carmen, or Marguerite Gautier, or Mimi Pinson, as the case may be—but never her real self. She seems to have no real self. She is like a harp, which vibrates to every idle wind of emotion, but

has no sensation of its own. All in her is momentary fanciful, and without consequence. It's true that she never had any training. I ought to have remembered that, and been gentler with her."

"You know her early history, then?"

"Her name was Félicie Lebon. Her father was a strolling violinist, her mother a strolling singer—both of them of the class who wander from one small theatre to another among the provincial towns in France. The girl was born into the theatre, so to speak. She never knew any other life, never any other standard of honor, morality, or self-control. She had less of a permanent home than a gypsy, less nurturing than many a wild bird. One thing only her parents gave her, a more or less sound artistic training. They died just as she was becoming known."

"That must have been about the time when I first saw her."

"Well—to go back to the night in Chaillot's room. After the first interchange of salutations, she took no further notice of me, except that my vanity was tickled in hearing her say to Chaillot, '*Quel beau garçon! Qui est-il?*' This was in parenthesis, as she explained to Chaillot how, down in her room, she had heard him singing and had not been able to resist the impulse to run up for an impromptu rehearsal. In a few minutes they were singing together. Felicia changed in a flash from Marguerite to Carmen. The maid sat demurely just inside the door; I, by a window that looked out on the gas-lit windings of the Thames. You can understand that the scene has never faded from my memory. Felicia sang and acted for my benefit; that was clear; but it was done with wonderful skill. And then the quality in her voice—"

"Yes, I remember," said Vassall. "The one word

'*L'amour,*' as she sings it to Escamillo in the smugglers' scene, is enough to call up in a man all the seven devils of desire."

"Don't!" interrupted Lechmere. "It rouses something in me to know that even you have heard her and responded to that temptation. I am like a fool when I think that any one else has listened to her or spoken to her or seen her. I am jealous of all who are near her, or have ever been near her. I am like one of the people in 'L'Africaine,' *jaloux de ce qui n'est plus.*"

"You have been hard hit, Dick."

"I said just now that at her entry I had received the *coup de foudre.* There was, however, a moment later when I was, as it were, blasted. It was at the very end of their singing. They had come to that passage which the barytones always find so difficult: '*Si tu m'aimes, Carmen*'; it is just before Escamillo's exit to the bull-ring. They had already sung it several times, so that Chaillot might get quite easily the queer interval ending in the high E flat. '*Encore une dernière fois,*' said Felicia, and they began again. She had hitherto sung her phrase, '*Oui, je t'aime,*' snuggling up to him as she does on the stage. But this time she slipped from Chaillot and turned towards me, fixing her great eyes on mine, and spreading her hands apart with a gesture that signified the Lord knows what. '*Oui, je t'aime,*' she sang. The effrontery of the act was veiled by the air of amusing mockery with which she picked up her floating laces on each side and made a deep reverence. Before I had time to spring to my feet it was all over. She was Marguerite in the garden again, all innocence and timidity. After a word or two to Chaillot she turned and wished us both the most modest of good-nights, and then glided from the room."

There was a long pause. Lechmere rose and began to pace restlessly up and down on the balcony.

"That was at the end of May," he went on again. "In August we were married. We took a house in England, near Windsor. Felicia was pleased with the new part she was playing; she was pleased to be acting the rôle of a lady in real life and without the footlights. In our walks and drives through the Berkshire forests, in idle, dreaming, drifting days upon the Thames, I could forget what she had been before she became my wife. She seemed to forget it, too. It was as if we had waked together into a new existence in which there never had been anything before we knew each other. I don't say that there were no jarring notes in this happy time at Windsor. Now and then there was a word, a letter, a recollection, which reminded me that we were both as actors in a great scene on a great stage, that the curtain must go down one day, and that we must return again into the actual. But I could always put the thought away from me. Face to face with a creature so simple and gentle, it was impossible to believe anything of her but the best."

"Could you not have kept that fiction up?"

"No; she wouldn't let me. She wouldn't stay on the pedestal on which I had placed her. She wouldn't even keep up the rôle of country lady which it had pleased her at first to play. I saw the change coming in the autumn. She grew tired of the part, tired of the repose, tired of the high-bred conventionality of the life. She began to call herself *canaille*, to assert her Bohemian tastes, to use language which, coming from her, revolted me. Little by little I got used to that. As she sank I sank with her. There was something abject in my attitude towards her. There is still."

"Excuse me, Dick," said Vassall, uneasily, "but

aren't you telling me too much? You needn't give me details, you know. Something may be left to my imagination."

"Keep quiet, old chap, for Heaven's sake, and let me tell the thing my own way. Well, to cut my story shorter, when Felicia had had enough of England we went abroad, first to Paris, then to Cannes, then to Egypt. In the spring we were back in Paris again. By this time the idyl was played out. I had grown to despise my wife and yet to worship her. My life was to run her errands, my ambition to satisfy her fancies."

"You were her slave at a time when you should have been her master."

"You talk easily, old boy, because you talk out of your own experience. You know the Boston woman who is east wind made flesh, but you don't know the woman out of whom you cannot drive the devil even by prayer and fasting. You don't know the woman who is all spirit and nerve and flame and electricity; who can be neither caught nor quenched nor bound nor beaten nor broken; who can quell you with a look, or lash you to the bone with a contemptuous word, or bring you cringing and crawling to her feet with a smile or a glance of approval. A story-book woman, you will say, no doubt; the woman-villain in a melodrama; but, I tell you, the woman lives."

Again Lechmere threw himself into the chair beside Vassall, and made an effort to speak calmly.

"In the spring in Paris we had our first serious quarrel. It had always been understood between us that she had left the stage. I had paid her debts—debts of which I knew nothing until we were in Egypt—on the condition that she should not sing again. She had given me her promise and I counted on it. You can judge, then, of my

amazement when I discovered in Paris that, even before going to Egypt, she had signed a contract to sing at Covent Garden in the following summer. Well, after a stormy scene I accepted that. For once, I think, she was a little grateful. The time in London was fairly happy. She sang as she had never sung before. It was the season when every one began to talk of her. Gradually I became what I have always despised—the husband of the prima donna. I accompanied her in the carriage and looked after her wraps. That was my business, and I was at once as proud and as humble as a Lord Chamberlain before the queen."

"If a man is happy in his duties," said Vassall, "I suppose it doesn't matter what they are."

"I wasn't happy, and yet I hugged my unhappiness. It was misery to be with her, and yet it was death to be away."

"And what during all that time were you to her?"

"You couldn't tell; she was so capricious, so changeable, so impossible. There were days when she couldn't do without me; there were others when I was a nonentity; there were others still when the very sight of me sent her into fits of rage. You couldn't tell what change twenty-four hours would bring about. In our house there was neither care nor order. In the midst of luxury we lived as in a circus-tent. The tradesmen robbed, the servants looted. Money lay about loose in every drawer, on every table. Rings and bracelets to which she had taken a moment's fancy were flung aside and forgotten, or lost at the theatre, or dropped from the carriage. I myself fell into her ways. I ceased to take any account of what came in or what went out. In spite of her own earnings and all my income we were constantly embarrassed for funds. At the end of that London season we found ourselves positively hard-up."

"Poor old Dick," said Vassall, softly, the sense of domestic and financial disorder producing on his practical New England mind a deeper impression than any story of a broken heart.

"I don't believe I need tell you any more, Harry," Lechmere said, with an abrupt change of tone.

"No, I think I can pretty well guess the rest."

"Besides, you have probably read what came out in the papers when we were divorced."

"Some of it. I hadn't the heart to read it all."

"It was worse than anything that got into print. But let that be. The question is, what am I to do?"

"What do you want to do?"

"One of two things: to go back to her or—to throw up the game."

"You mean by that—?"

"That without her I'd rather be under ground."

"I wouldn't take that view of it if I were you."

"I don't take the view; the view takes me."

"Don't be a coward, Dick, and don't be a fool. Think of the wrongs she has done you."

"Think of them! Do I do anything else but think of them? And yet I would go through them all again; I would bear them ten times over and ten times worse, only to get into her presence, only to hear her voice or to see her smile. To be with her is like wine to me, Harry; it is like opium; it is music and beauty and meat and drink and passion and sunshine and health, and everything that I can't do without."

"If it is like that, and you are telling me the truth—"

"Upon my soul."

"Then in your place I would take the woman back."

"Take her? Suppose she won't come?"

"Make her; force her; break her spirit; beat her down."

Lechmere laughed scornfully.

"Listen to me, Dick," said Vassall, springing to his feet, while Lechmere remained seated. "You have gone about this whole business in the wrong way from the first. As you say, you've been abject. You have reversed the situation in which a man ought to stand towards his wife. You have put her first instead of second."

"She could never come second to any one."

"Except you. Remember this, that nature made the man to lead and the woman to follow; that law and gospel and common-sense alike require that the husband shall command and the wife obey. Change that order, and the result must be some sort of topsy-turvey-dom, a comic-opera life of quarrels and caprices and divorces."

"And if she will not obey?"

"Make her obey. Tame her as Petruchio tamed Katherine. What is a man fit for if he can't control a woman? A woman naturally has her place in the great scheme of things, but it is a second place. She must be put there and kept there. She will slip out if she can, but she must be driven back again. Mind you, her own happiness depends upon it. She must be kept in subjection, or there will be the devil to pay everywhere. She is in our lives what the fire is in our chimneys. We need it for warmth and comfort and all the arts of civilization. But it must be kept just there. Once let it get beyond its proper confines, and the whole house burns down. A wife is at once the greatest joy and the greatest danger in a man's life. In her place, she is an angel; out of her place, she can be the very devil. Yield to her once, and she will expect you to yield again; give her an inch, and she will take an ell. When she is ruled, there

is order; when she is obeyed, there is anarchy. We good, soft-hearted Americans, with our easy-going ways and our false notions of chivalry, have adopted a foolish habit of thinking she must hold the reins and wield the whip. The result is that so many of our married couples are driving like fury to disaster. That is what creates the Divorce Court. We have set up Woman on a sort of little throne; we have put a crown of tinsel on her head and a wooden sceptre in her hand. The result has been to make her silly and pretentious, unequal to the position, and yet unwilling to come down."

"Have you said all this to Miss Faneuil, old boy?"

"If Miss Faneuil marries me and needs the lesson, she will learn it at the proper time. But to return to you, Dick. If you want my advice it is this. Go back to your wife. Find her, wherever she is. Drag her out of the life she is leading—"

"But the divorce?"

"Treat it as waste paper. You have both will and wealth; you can do as you please then. You love this woman; you say you cannot live without her. Take her, then. If you can condone her conduct and her character, take her and keep her. Force her; bring her to her knees; you can find a way to do it. Pursue her; persecute her; be brutal to her, if you will; but do what you want to do. After all, she is your wife. All the divorces in the world cannot undo the tie that has been formed between you. You have just two courses, then. If you want her, take her, I say, whether she will or no. If you don't want her, toss her back into the mire whence you pulled her out, and think no more about her."

Suiting the action to the word, Vassall jerked the glow-

ing end of his cigarette over the balustrade into the lawn below. Lechmere hesitated before speaking.

"I gave you the right, Harry, old friend, to talk to me like that, therefore I ought not to feel any resentment. I will think over what you have said, and all that is possible in your advice I will follow. If not, I will—"

"What?" Vassall asked, as Lechmere rose.

"Go to sleep."

"Perhaps that is the best thing for both of us to do."

"I want a long sleep—a long, long sleep."

"Don't talk like that, Dick," said Vassall, as the two clasped hands. "It is weak and—and—"

"Ridiculous. Yes, I know."

"Remember that I stand with you, whatever comes."

"Don't promise, old chap. The day may come when you too may give me up."

"Oh, go to bed. You've smoked too much, and talked too much, and drank too much chartreuse. Go to bed and sleep on what I've said to you, and you'll get up to-morrow a wiser and a bolder man."

"Good-night, old friend, and thanks."

"Good-night, then."

Vassall went into his room, shut the window, and drew down the curtain.

Lechmere remained on the balcony looking at the stars.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Mrs. Faneuil's note arrived in the morning with an invitation to luncheon, Vassall accepted; Lechmere found a reason for declining.

This was as Petrina hoped. She wanted a quiet talk with Vassall, chiefly to give him the news, which she was sure he had not yet received, of his sister's separation from her husband. Lady de Bohun wrote seldom to her brother. She was older than he, and since his boyhood there had been little sympathy between them. Vassall had paid occasional visits to Orpington Park, but always with an increased disapproval of his sister's manner of life. He liked his brother-in-law, but looked upon him as indolent, and indifferent to his own welfare. While keeping aloof from his sister, Vassall was jealous of her reputation and sensitive to any gossip in which her name was involved. That this latest intelligence should come to him and his mother as gently as possible, Petrina meant to break the news herself.

Interference with this kindly plan came from a quite unexpected quarter. Petrina had just put the last touches to her pretty autumnal costume of golden brown and mauve when, looking from her bedroom window, she saw coming up the avenue a cumbrous country cariole in which were seated Mr. and Mrs. Tyrell and Gentian.

"Horrors, mamma!" Petrina cried into the adjoining room. "Do look out. Here come the bride and bridegroom."

"Nonsense, child!" Mrs. Faneuil replied, continuing to twist and turn before the pier-glass. "They're still on their honeymoon. It must be some one else."

"But it is, mamma. There; Gentian sees me. She is waving her handkerchief."

"You're quite right," said Mrs. Faneuil, who had gone to the window. "It is Maria; yes, and Gentian; yes, and Mr. Tyrell too."

"Do go and make sure that there is enough for luncheon," said Petrina. "I will go down and receive them."

"We've come to lunch," cried Mrs. Tyrell, as the carriage drew up at the steps.

"We are very glad to see you," said Petrina, who stood on the veranda and tried to be cordial. "But you seem to have dropped from the skies. We thought you were still in Europe."

"Papa had business which brought us home unexpectedly," Gentian explained, while Mrs. Tyrell descended heavily from the cariole. "We came in the *Titanic*. We knew you'd be simply crazy to see papa and mamma, and so we came up to the hotel at Deane. We've driven over from there just to get your congratulations. You know we've never had them—have we, mamma? Have we, papa?"

"I am sure I am delighted to offer them," Petrina said, with an effort to be gracious. She kissed first Mrs. Tyrell and then Gentian, who skipped lightly over the wheel from the back seat.

"Do let me introduce papa," Gentian said, in the deep tones of a high-priestess about to unveil a sacred image. "It is so dear to have a papa—so dear and so strange. Papa, this is Cousin Petrina, whom you have never seen. Petrina, this is my papa, doubly, trebly mine since I have seen him married to mamma."

Mr. Tyrell turned, after having given an order to the coachman, and held out his hand.

"I am very glad to make your acquaintance, my dear young lady," he said, stiffly. "I suppose I should have known you long ago but for circumstances—that is to say, circumstances—"

"Over which you had no control," said Petrina, laughing.

"Precisely so," said Mr. Tyrell, with a stiff little bow. "The fates were against me."

"Not entirely, papa," said Gentian, holding up a reproving finger, "since you had me. There is such a thing as compelling Fate; and I have done it, haven't I, papa?"

"You have, indeed, my dear."

Mr. Tyrell was a small man of sixty, with thin gray hair and beard. His eyes were blue and weak; his expression one of suppressed dissatisfaction with the world. He was extremely neat, and wore handsome but unobtrusive jewelry. The fine cabochon ruby which glowed against his white silk scarf had its mate on the little finger of his small left hand. He was commonly supposed to say little, but, in compensation, to think much.

Miss Gentian Tyrell was the young and feminine reproduction of her father: small, neat, too consciously elegant, *poseuse* and *précieuse*. She was pretty but pretentious, clever but sententious. She was too much aware of living on a high level and too openly determined to drag other people up to it. Men found her an agreeable neighbor at dinner for the first half-hour, and then wondered why her conversation was so fatiguing.

Looking at Mrs. Tyrell, any one would have understood why she and Mr. Tyrell had lived apart for five-and-twenty years. They had been, in fact, divorced in

Gentian's infancy; and the wonder was that they should have married in the first place. It was not merely that she was much taller and larger than he (for love is not always guided by a suitability in size), but you could see that their tendencies were different. It was evident at a glance that Mr. Tyrell's taste would be for a small place in the country, and for life in a modest style; Mrs. Tyrell's for a large place in the town, and for life on a footing consistent with a generous income. Here were the rocks on which their barque of early happiness had gone to pieces. Mrs. Tyrell, as a young woman, had no mind for her husband's humdrum life, and so she had taken an early opportunity of slipping from it, carrying her child and a handsome alimony with her. Henceforth she had her house in Beacon Street, while Mr. Tyrell found repose in a small place in the Newtons. Mrs. Tyrell had become a patroness of liberal literature, new religions, and drawing-room readings. Mr. Tyrell had given himself to the gentle pursuits of bee-keeping and growing flowers.

Under these circumstances all had gone well until their daughter had budded towards womanhood. As early as at the age of seventeen Miss Gentian Tyrell was aware that she had a mission—that of re-marrying her parents. No Iphigenia, no Jeanne d'Arc, was ever more consciously dedicated to a cause than Gentian to the reunion of Mr. and Mrs. Tyrell. She worked for it, wept for it, fought for it, and would have prayed for it, only that in most of the new religions through which Gentian had passed prayer was considered a slight upon the Almighty. Mr. and Mrs. Tyrell had halted, hesitated, struggled, wriggled, advanced, receded, consented, refused, and shown themselves difficult in many ways; but in the end Gentian had had the reward which rarely fails to crown persistency and pluck;

her parents became engaged. The fact was duly chronicled in the press, and sheaves of American Beauty roses were sent to Mrs. Tyrell by Gentian's friends. For the affianced couple it was like a second springtime. Mrs. Tyrell, who was well into August, and Mr. Tyrell, who was in full October, went back as it were to May. There were festal dinners in Beacon Street "to meet Mr. Tyrell," and five-o'clock teas at Newton in honor of the coming bride. Mrs. Tyrell wore an engagement-ring and felt the situation most romantic. Mr. Tyrell kept as much as possible out of sight and wished the ceremony over. At the wedding Mrs. Tyrell was dressed in pearl-gray, like a widow; and Gentian gave the bride away. Cards were sent out engraved with the statement that "Miss Gentian Tyrell announces the remarriage of her father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Jackson Tyrell," and then the newly wedded pair, with their enterprising child, went off to Europe.

Mrs. Tyrell and Mrs. Faneuil were sisters; they had been in their youth "the pretty Miss Phillipses." Any one who now saw them embracing on the veranda would have noticed the resemblance, as well as the difference, between them. Mrs. Tyrell made you think of Mrs. Faneuil, as a peony suggests a rose. Mrs. Tyrell was handsome, Mrs. Faneuil pretty; Mrs. Tyrell was big and beaming, Mrs. Faneuil plump and buxom; Mrs. Tyrell had the air of a professional lady-patroness, Mrs. Faneuil that of a practical matron in her home.

"Oh, Aunt Isadora, do congratulate them!" Gentian cried, when every one had kissed.

"I did so when they were married seven-and-twenty years ago," said Mrs. Faneuil, "and it seemed to bring them bad luck."

"But they didn't have me then," said Gentian, archly.

"I should hope not," Mrs. Faneuil replied, bluntly.

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try again," said Mr. Tyrell. It was his one facetious formula on the subject of his second matrimonial venture. He used it whenever a remark seemed called for and nothing more original was at hand.

"Well, I respect your courage, Maria; and yours too, Jackson."

"They say it's a wise child that knows its own father," simpered Mrs. Tyrell, "but Gentian has made a match for hers."

"I suppose you had something to do with it, Mrs. Tyrell," said Petrina, who had been standing somewhat apart, trying to conceal her annoyance.

"I? Oh, little or nothing. Gentian did it, dear child. It was quite an original idea, wasn't it?"

"I could never have carried it out," said Gentian, in her deep voice and *précieuse* distinctness of utterance, "if it had not been for Spiritual Science. I used to sit for hours at a time and just *will* it."

"I thought you had given that up," said Mrs. Faneuil.

"Mamma has. I haven't—yet. I couldn't do without it. It lifts one up so. It shows one how futile are the ends for which other people live."

"One can see that easily enough without Spiritual Science," said Mrs. Faneuil.

"And then the nothingness of everything is such a subtle, consoling truth that I wonder how people exist who don't believe it."

"Well, I'm surprised at you, Maria," Mrs. Faneuil broke in. "When I last saw you Spiritual Science was a mania with you."

"I have no longer any faith in the Western systems,"

said Mrs. Tyrell, with a touch of sadness. "I am sorry not to be able to accept the simple creeds in which so many of my friends can trust, but I have long been conscious that the Western religions do not touch the heart of life."

"Mamma has joined the Initiated," said Gentian.

"The what?" said Mrs. Faneuil.

"The Initiated," repeated Mrs. Tyrell. "We study the Eastern Mysteries."

"Good gracious!" Mrs. Faneuil cried. "It sounds terribly suggestive. I hope they're not indecent. Do you study them in Boston?"

"We have begun, but of course our headquarters are at Delhi. We are a little band as yet, but I think we shall soon have a light to give to the world."

"Don't go enlightening the world, Maria, whatever else you do. It is labor in vain. But what do you do? What do you learn? Any of those wonderful conjuring tricks that we saw in Cairo?"

"It is a purely esoteric religion," said Mrs. Tyrell, lowering her eyes modestly and letting her handsome eyelids fall. "We are forbidden to speak of our doctrines to non-believers."

"Then I am sure it is something indecent. Jackson, keep your eye on her. Or are you studying Eastern Mysteries yourself?"

"I have two Western mysteries to engage my attention now," said Mr. Tyrell, with a thin smile at his own witticism.

"You won't find them difficult to see through, I think," said Mrs. Faneuil, laughing. "But come upstairs to your ablutions. Mysteries and ablutions seem to go together, don't they?"

"Libations, Aunt Isadora," Gentian corrected. "Mamma has a little shrine at home before which she offers a

libation of wine from a shallow golden bowl three times a day. It's very pretty, really, and so classic, too. It makes mamma look like a figure on a Pompeiian vase, doesn't it, mamma? Doesn't it, papa?"

"Do you assist, Jackson?" Mrs. Faneuil asked, as they turned to enter the house. "Libations of wine three times a day is a rather expensive form of worship, I should think."

"It's California wine," Mr. Tyrell explained, promptly, "and Maria buys it in the wood."

The bride and bridegroom, with their daughter, followed Mrs. Faneuil up-stairs. Petrina remained on the veranda alone with her ill-humor. She was impatient for Vassall's arrival, but before he came the whole party had descended. The instant the slight confusion caused by his greetings had passed, Vassall found his attention caught by Gentian's deep, musical voice and distinct enunciation.

"Oh, Mr. Vassall," she said. "I am so glad to meet you. It seems as if I already knew you, though I think we've never met in Boston. But I know your sister so well. In fact, we have just come from seeing her."

Petrina, who had observed Gentian's seizure of Vassall, and who disdained all small feminine manœuvres, now became alarmed. Gentian was quite capable of bringing up the subject of Lady de Bohun's separation from Sir Humphrey.

"Luncheon is ready, mother," Petrina said, with the intention of causing a diversion. "Had we not better go in?"

The move was successful. Vassall had time only to bow and smile and murmur some inarticulate phrase before he found himself drawn into the little irregular procession which began to move towards the dining-room. There, for the first few minutes, Petrina felt safe.

She had placed Vassall between Gentian and Mrs. Tyrell; but the conversation turned first on the beauty of the room, with its Chippendale furniture and its colored prints, and then on the magnificence of the world outside, with its autumn-painted summits surging like crests on some wonderful woodland sea. From their places at the table they could look up at the mountain and down at the lake; they could even point out to each other the far, irregular line of the Green Mountains of Vermont.

"And yet I sigh for England," said Gentian to Vassall in her deepest tones. "This vast beauty appals me. It almost makes my vision ache."

"Why not sit with your back to it, then?" said Mrs. Faneuil.

"I feel as if I were up among the spirits of the air," Gentian continued to Vassall, but with a faint smile towards Mrs. Faneuil, just enough to acknowledge the fact that she had spoken. "I feel as if I were with Manfred on the Jungfrau or with Mephistopheles on the Brocken. It is too much, too great; my spirit reels. Now in England all is prettily adapted to the common life of man. At Orpington Park—"

"Gentian, do have another cutlet," Petrina interrupted. "You are eating nothing."

"Oh, yes, Petrina dear. Don't think of me."

"You must be hungry after your long drive from Deane. Wasn't it tiring?"

"Not very. But as I was saying, Mr. Vassall, at Orpington Park—"

"Reynolds, pass Miss Tyrell the peas," said Mrs. Faneuil, who seized Petrina's idea. "Mr. Vassall, if you keep that child talking so she'll starve. It will need something stronger than a libation of California wine to make her fit to drive back to Deane."

But Vassall himself walked into the danger from which Petrina and her mother would have kept him.

"Miss Tyrell tells me that she knows Emmy," he said, leaning slightly towards Petrina.

It was the first time since he had arrived that they had a chance to look each other in the eyes. Petrina was vexed to find herself almost blushing. It unnerved her for taking that lead in the conversation which she would otherwise have seized.

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Tyrell. "We know Lady de Bohun very intimately. We were at Orpington Park just before we sailed."

"We went down to luncheon," Gentian explained. "It was such a pleasure to find dear Lady de Bohun bearing up so well."

"Emmy is quite able to manage her own affairs," said Mrs. Faneuil, with a look at her sister which was meant to convey unspeakable hints as to the necessity for letting the subject drop.

"Quite so," Mrs. Tyrell assented, with no understanding of Mrs. Faneuil's pantomime. "In fact, I told her so. I told her that I thought she was acting very wisely and that other people would surely come round to her way of thinking."

"What Emmy needs most," said Vassall, frankly, "is not to make other people think like her, but to think like other people. She is apt to be too independent—"

"But not here," said Gentian, promptly. "Every one thinks her so wise. She has carried herself in the most tactful way."

"Gentian has been of the greatest help to her," said Mrs. Tyrell, sympathetically.

"Gentian is always so helpful," said Petrina, desperately. "Do you remember that time when I should have sprained my ankle if—"

"Yes," chimed in Mrs. Faneuil, wildly following Petrina's lead. "What presence of mind you displayed, child! I've often meant to ask you the name of that liniment you used, but each time I see you—"

"Has my sister sprained her ankle?" Vassall asked, in some perplexity. "My mother hasn't heard anything about it."

"No, she was playing golf when we were there," said Gentian. "We were so delighted to see that she had the heart for it. Even Sir Humphrey, when we told him of it in London, said it was the best thing she could do. He thought it would keep her from brooding over things."

"She has never been inclined to do that," said Vassall.

"But now everything is so changed for her, poor thing. I have been through it all, so that I know what it must be." Mrs. Tyrell simpered, with the romantic manner she assumed in alluding to her matrimonial vicissitudes. "But I hope their trouble may end as ours has done, Jackson; I hope and pray that it may."

"You don't mean that you'll pray, but that you'll pour out a libation of California wine for it, Maria," said Mrs. Faneuil, scornfully. "But let us change the subject. Other people's affairs—"

"But I don't understand," said Vassall, looking in mystification from one to the other. "Have any of the children been ill? Has Humphrey—?"

"Oh," cried Gentian, warmly—so warmly that Petrina looked at her with new attention and a new idea dawning in her mind—"nothing could exceed Sir Humphrey's kindness, consideration, and tact — nothing. Even Lady de Bohun says so. She says he has been a gentleman through and through. Oh no, Mr. Vassall! Don't think Sir Humphrey has been to blame.

sall's self-control. "Her letter gives all the details, as you will see. There is nothing in it to distress Mrs. Vassall—much."

"That's good," said Vassall. "She is the one to be most thought of."

Then, by common consent, the subject was dropped, and Mr. Tyrell began to compare the merits of the big new liner *Titanic* with those of her rival, the *Sicilia*.



A Vitagraph Production. *Let Not Man Put Asunder.*

HARRY VASSALL (LESLIE ANSTEN) AND PETRINA FANEUIL (PAULINE FREDERICK) ANNOUNCE THEIR ENGAGEMENT.

CHAPTER V

LUNCHEON ended, the party returned to the veranda for coffee. Vassall stood, cup in hand, somewhat remote from the others, and looked out silently over the panorama of wooded mountains. The slight flush upon his lean and sun-tanned cheek made it evident to Petrina that he had felt the conversation at the table more keenly than he had shown. For the first time she was conscious of that motherly element in her regard which tinges the affection most women feel for the men they love. She wanted to comfort him.

"Don't stay here," she said, going up to him. "Come down to the lake."

"Gladly," he answered. "And won't you bring that letter with you?"

"Wait a minute while I put on a hat."

There was something intimate in their tone towards each other, something new to-day, something which seemed to separate them distinctly from the four who were laughing and gossiping at the other end of the veranda.

When, a little later, Petrina returned, Vassall was impressed anew with that suggestion of mystery in her which baffled Lechmere. She was a striking figure, quiet yet commanding, feminine yet with a touch of something almost to be feared. In looking at her you wondered whether her charm lay in beauty or in fascination, and whether behind that delicately sphinx-like face there lay all the emotions of the normal human heart.

"We are going to the lake," she called to the others, as Vassall joined her. "Don't go before we return. We shall not be long."

"We have no intention of hurrying," Gentian replied. "Aunt Isadora is in a mocking mood, and we are furnishing sport."

"I am only curious about the Eastern Mysteries," said Mrs. Faneuil, as Vassall and Petrina passed near their group and reached the avenue. "Maria owns up that they are not what we should call moral; but then she thinks that on the subject of morals we hold narrow views. I wonder how she would have us broaden them?"

"I am extremely sorry," said Petrina, when they were well out of hearing, "not to have told you about Emmy's letter yesterday. I meant to have done so, but there seemed no chance when Mr. Lechmere was here."

"I wish you had," Vassall answered, simply. "Bad news is always bad, but it sometimes makes a difference from whom we hear it."

"I wanted you to receive it from me. I thought it might seem gentler."

"Much gentler. Even as it is, it is less annoying since you are sharing it."

"I should naturally want to do that. During the last few years I have been so much with Emmy that she seems rather like my sister than like yours."

"You don't think I am not fond of her? I am. Up to the time of her marriage no brother and sister could have been more devoted. Even afterwards, when she first went to live in England, and the children were still babies, we wrote to each other constantly. It has been only within five years that I have seen a change in her —a change that I could never bring myself to approve."

"Don't you think you may misjudge her?—that you may be too hard on her?"

"No, Miss Faneuil. Emmy is an excellent example of a certain modern type—the young woman who has been brought up carefully, modestly, and religiously; who marries into a new and more brilliant world; who goes among people who hold views which she has been taught to consider lax, and who uphold a standard of conduct which she has been led to think wrong. She is first shocked, then reconciled, then amused. She is courted, petted, and admired till her head is turned and her moral sense confused. She ends like most converts by going beyond her very teachers and out-Heroding Herod in acts of daring."

"And yet I doubt if you realize how little wrong there is in her."

"Wrong is a word of many meanings. If I applied it to my sister I should limit it to what is foolish, frivolous, and indiscreet."

"Those are fairly comprehensive headings," said Petrina, with a little laugh.

"How wrong folly, frivolity, and indiscretion can be is evident from the fact that she has left her husband."

"For his fault, not hers."

"Ostensibly. De Bohun, too, has been wrong, I know. But he is a good fellow at heart, and can have committed no sin which Emmy might not easily condone."

"Isn't it the man who speaks there?"

"Isn't it the man who ought to speak?"

"But the woman has her rights."

"Yes, and her duties."

There was a hard, dominant note in Vassall's tone which was new to Petrina. She had a vague feeling that he was more masterful than she had supposed.

A suspicion arose in her mind that the man who could be so severe upon his sister might not be docile to his wife.

"Won't you look at Emmy's letter?" she asked, almost timidly, drawing the paper from her pocket. "Perhaps, when you have read it, you will feel that the matter is less serious than it seems."

"Thanks," he said, taking the letter from her. "But if you are going to be her advocate I shall have to dismiss the charge."

They left the avenue and entered a broad, grass-grown path which led directly to the lake. They walked slowly, Vassall reading the letter as he went. When he had come to the end of it he folded the loose sheets and replaced them in the envelope, which he handed back to Petrina.

"It is as I thought," he said, quietly.

"You mean that—?"

"That Emmy has no new grievance against Humphrey. She is tired of him, and tired of her life as the mother of a growing family. She wants freedom to seek new excitements. She has turned into that kind of irresponsible modern woman who follows her own impulses without conscience or thought of consequence."

Petrina flushed a little, but, as he was looking straight and sternly before him, he did not see the pretty color adding a new beauty to the ivory-tinted cheek.

"Is that so very bad?" she asked, still timidly.

"In my judgment, few things are worse."

"But if you stood at Emmy's point of view don't you think you might see reasons where now you find none?"

"This doesn't seem to me a question affected by the point of view. It is one of absolute duty, and is independent of conditions. I admit that a woman may forsake her husband, as a last resource, but her children, never."

"But Emmy has not forsaken them precisely."

"Practically. No one can read between the lines of her letter without seeing that she is satisfied to be free from them."

"And it is she who remains at Orpington Park. That signifies that Sir Humphrey has left her, rather than she him."

"That is merely Humphrey's good nature. He is one of those fellows who would put himself in the wrong so that she might have the air of being in the right."

"How you men hang together!" said Petrina, looking at him with a smile.

"I am not taking a side in this affair," Vassall replied, earnestly. "I admit that Humphrey has not been always wise, but I affirm that Emmy has been less so. Because she is my sister I cannot blind myself to the fact that her conduct has been ill-judged."

"But Sir Humphrey must have agreed to this," Petrina argued. "Otherwise things could not have been so happily arranged for Emmy."

"She has teased and worried him into it."

"How little you seem to understand her. You do her injustice, I am sure. Hers is a nature that everybody loves. No one is more popular. Wherever she goes she is like sunshine."

"Yes, the sunshine which to-day makes you glad to be alive; but which scorches you to-morrow so that you must either run into the shade or have a sunstroke."

"I don't think I should care to have you for a brother—"

"Would you have me for a—?"

"Nor as any relation whatever," Petrina finished, calmly.

The path-way ended, and they came out upon a bit of greensward bordering the lake. It was a pretty piece

of lawn, closely cut and carefully kept, on which Mrs. Faneuil and a few of her sedate contemporaries liked to play croquet. There were rustic seats here and there, some long enough for two or three, and some like arm-chairs.

"Let us sit down," said Petrina.

She took one of the arm-chairs. Vassall threw himself upon the grass. It was what Petrina had intended. She liked the position better so than side by side.

The afternoon was very still. The water was like burnished metal. A solitary boat lay motionless far out upon the lake. The hills all round were wonderful in color, as though some strong angel had flown down and painted them in all the hues of heaven.

"Nor as any relation whatever," Vassall repeated, musingly, his gaze fixed upon a tree, which blazed like the Burning Bush, beside the lake. "The expression is terribly inclusive."

"It was meant to be so," said Petrina, who ventured to look at him, since he was not looking at her.

"And exclusive."

"I suppose it is that too."

"And may I ask why you make this severe decision?"

"Because you are so hard."

"But if I softened?"

"Then I might reconsider my opinion. But I should still find you unforgiving."

"But if I forgave?"

"Then I should think better of you; but I should nevertheless take note that you are narrow."

"But if I broadened?"

"I should begin to have hopes for you, only that I know you are so self-righteous."

He winced at the last word.

"I must have a great deal to overcome."

"You have."

"Anything that you have not yet mentioned?"

"Oh, much."

"Would it be too much trouble to go on with the list?"

"It wouldn't be too much trouble, but it would take too long."

"Once that you are willing to take the trouble, we might find the time."

"Not to-day."

"No, but there are other days."

"Are you so anxious to hear your faults?"

"Yes, from you."

"But if you don't want to give them up?"

"I would give up anything for you."

"That is so easily said, and means so little."

"But I mean it."

"In any sense?"

"In every sense."

"Suppose some time I wanted to take you at your word?"

"You would find it waiting for your test."

"Then some day—"

Vassall suddenly looked upward, and Petrina stopped in confusion.

"Yes?" he said, softly. "Some day—?"

"Oh, nothing. I will not say it."

"Some day I may do something for you? Give up something for you? Be something for you? Is it that, Petrina?"

"Perhaps."

She bent her dark eyes on his, and there was the dawning of a smile on her finely chiselled lips. She was self-possessed, but her voice was low.

"Then why not now?"

She made no reply.

"Then why not now, Petrina?"

She still made no reply.

"I may call you Petrina, mayn't I?"

"Haven't you already done so?"

"And you are not offended?"

"No."

Vassall turned his eyes away again, looking absently across the lake. Petrina did not stir.

"Do you know what that permission makes me hope?"

"No."

"That I may go up out of the dull world in which my life has been spent, and enter that in which everything is glad and golden."

"Is there such a world?"

"Yes; near you."

There was a long silence. The stillness of the world around seemed to have descended on the two who felt themselves trembling on the edge of the supreme avowal.

"You know I love you," Vassall said, at last.

"Yes; I know," she answered, simply.

"And you—if you could care for me—" he began.

"And I do," she said.

There was another silence. A bird in the wood began to sing sleepily and plaintively. Petrina, strangely content, continued to look down upon the lover at her feet; while he, too happy to believe or comprehend his happiness, too happy to speak or move or even to glance upward lest he should break the spell, gazed dreamily over the waters, at the many-colored mountains far away.

CHAPTER VI

PETRINA announced her engagement at once, so that the little flutter of interest it was bound to cause in Boston might be past before her return to town. She disdained the happy excitement other young women revel in at such a time. She had no curiosity to hear how the news was received among her friends, or whether it was mentioned in the papers. She neither sought nor shunned congratulations, and when they came she received them with a grave indifference, as though aware that they had no significance. The common opinion in Boston was that in accepting Henry Vassall she was "doing very well for herself," and marrying a man of whom she would be proud; but such approval made no impression on Petrina. She took it for granted that, out of a large selection of young men, mostly rich or rising, Fate had bestowed the best upon herself; it would have been a Fate with little knowledge of the fitness of things that could have acted otherwise.

There was thus no ecstasy in Petrina's joy, but she was quite content. She admitted to herself that there were men with more dash, fashion, and brilliancy than he whom she had chosen; but she flattered herself on seeing below the surface and putting capacity and character before elegance and good looks. Besides, she considered that Vassall's looks were good enough, and as for elegance, she meant to take that matter in hand by and by. For Petrina's happiness lay in the

future. She looked for it after marriage, not before. She had no definite plans, but only a general largeness of idea in which she saw herself as a star of considerable social magnitude, attended by a satellite able to reflect her light.

The ecstasy and excitement were on Vassall's side. He made no effort to conceal his joy, or to hide from the world his sense of having won a notable victory. He gave that full expression to his feelings which the reticent man allows himself only now and then in life, on the rare occasions when reserve is broken down.

Lechmere left for Lenox, and Vassall remained alone at Ashuelot. The month that followed was for both of the betrothed one of unbroken happiness. Vassall brought adoration to Petrina's shrine, and she found such pleasure in accepting it as some young goddess in the odor of the incense. It was her due, but none the less agreeable.

They were in the stage where talk of the future was still vague, where there were no clashings of opinion because there was no definiteness of plan. Now and then Vassall gave utterance to some hope which Petrina did not share, but she maintained a smiling silence, feeling sure of her power to correct whatever in his aims she did not care for. Now and then Petrina revealed to Vassall some deficiency of character which perplexed him, but he held his peace, never doubting his ability to develop in her anything she lacked. To each the other was a new and delightful accessory to life. The strands of love and self-love are difficult to disentangle. To Vassall, Petrina's destiny was to add beauty, poetry, and charm to his rough, masculine life; to Petrina, Vassall's task was to bring strength, stability, and importance into her manifest sphere of action. It did not occur to either to think of the other as leader; nor was there any

sense of rivalry, because each was in his or her own judgment so evidently first.

The weeks of love-making glided by, with no vexed questions raised. They lived in a world all lit up with magic tints like the maple-covered mountains round them.

"*Toujours dans le pays bleu?*" Mrs. Faneuil asked when Vassall arrived one day.

"*Dans le pays d'or,*" he replied, with fervor.

When Petrina appeared he and she went out on the lake together.

To them it was a lake of sapphire under turquoise skies. The masts of their barque were of gold and the sails of fine-twined purple. Palaces studded the shore, and laughter and happy music floated over the waters. But in this enchanted country they two were alone, caring for each other, living in each other, sufficient to each other.

"Is it a dream?" Petrina asked. "And shall we wake into reality?"

"This is reality," Vassall affirmed. "This is the true life; this is the true world—the life and the world which can be seen only when the eyes have been opened by love."

CHAPTER VII

It was not until Petrina had returned to Boston that any shadow on her happiness appeared. It came unexpectedly in her first call upon Vassall's mother.

Mrs. Vassall kept out of the world, and dressed in a fashionless mourning; but she was on the younger side of sixty. She had been a beauty in her time; and though on principle indifferent to outward adornment, she could not even now extinguish the light of her blue eyes nor hide the delicate transparency of her complexion. She had a sweet nature, a sweet voice, and gentle manners. Every one said it was no wonder that her son adored her.

When Vassall had written from Ashuelot the news of his engagement, the mother had spent one day weeping in her room, and another praying in the church. Then she was ready for her renunciation.

He was her only son. Since Emilia had married and gone to live in England he seemed in many ways like her only child. She loved and honored him; she was very proud of him. Now she was going to lose him. She had no illusions on that subject. Though he might continue to love her as before, she must now come second instead of first. With all dutifulness on his part and all good-will on hers, there never again could be the old intimacy between them, nor the same matter-of-course turning of the one towards the other.

"Yea, a sword shall go through thine own soul also,"

she repeated to herself. "This is the price one pays for motherhood."

But she was a reasonable woman and a good one; she bent herself to her lot, and resolved to do her duty. Henry should never know, she said, that his happiness was not her own.

When he wrote that his Petrina was beautiful and charming, she winced a little, but believed him. A Vassall could not marry any other. Besides, she knew his taste. A sweet, modest, gentle, Christian girl was what he would naturally bring her as a daughter.

It was not strange that Petrina should have been to her little more than a name. She did know that Peter Faneuil, with whom she remembered dancing when she was still Christina Pepperell, had left an only daughter. She knew, too, that he had married as a second wife one of the "pretty Phillipses." But that was all. Boston had become so big that families once intimate could now live side by side and know almost nothing of each other. Then, Petrina had been much abroad, returning only to spend the summers at Faneuil Hill. Then, Mrs. Vassall, since her widowhood, had kept little in touch with Boston. With a few old families who clung to their ancestral homes on Beacon Hill she maintained the acquaintanceship of former years; but she knew nothing of the Back Bay or of what she called the "new people," who had come into prominence since the war.

Mrs. Vassall lived, of course, in Old Cambridge, in the great white-and-yellow colonial house built by one of the Henry Vassalls before the Revolution. The very circumstance cut her off somewhat from the current of that modern Boston life in which she might have known something of Petrina. Mrs. Vassall was essentially of Old Cambridge. She was vaguely aware that

a great, rich, active Boston had come of late years into being, but it was not a Boston in which she herself was concerned. As she drove through Commonwealth Avenue she was conscious of a large and handsome quarter which had not existed when she was a girl. It was inhabited, she supposed, by people who "had made their money in speculation"—a fact which must naturally put them in a very indefinite social place. But it was nothing to her. The Boston to which she belonged was the Boston of old families closely related, and of old fortunes and family-seats transmitted from father to son. This was the Boston which had affiliations with Old Cambridge. Its people formed a merchant-aristocracy, dignified, stable, large-minded, and public-spirited; they were often learned, oftener witty, and nearly always worthy of esteem. Among them were to be found writers, artists, and philosophers, beautiful women, and brilliant men. Their living was simple, their principles were high. When they travelled they mingled with the best in every land and did honor to their city's reputation and their own.

In comparison, the newer Boston seemed to Mrs. Vassall noisy and pretentious. She shrank from it, shutting herself up more and more closely in her Old Cambridge life. As a Pepperell by birth (Sir William's family) and a Vassall by marriage, she had no social favors to ask of any one; she could follow, then, her own inclination, and live, as she said, "without display."

It was, therefore, no small comfort to her that in his selection of a wife, Harry's choice should have lighted on a Faneuil.

"One knows at least who she is," she said, "and the stock is good."

Her letters to Vassall questioned him closely as to

Petrina's character, habits, religion, and looks; but except on the last point she received no answer. Henry was very much in love, but vague. She therefore resolved to be patient until able to judge for herself.

The first meeting with Petrina came about unexpectedly to Mrs. Vassall. She was seated one day sewing at an upper window, when, looking out towards the street, she saw a victoria, drawn by two handsome black horses in silver-mounted harness, stop before the gate.

"What display!" thought Mrs. Vassall, as her eye wandered from the steeds in their trappings to the coachman and footman in their liveries.

Display was Mrs. Vassall's horror. It belonged, she thought, to the "new people," who liked to show that they had money. She, too, had money in modest measure, but she was careful to spend it in such a way as to produce no visible effect. She had her horses, her carriage, and her coachman, but from their style no one would ever have suspected the sums she spent upon them. She wore only the richest and costliest materials, but from her appearance only the expert in stuffs could have detected the fact. This pleased Mrs. Vassall. It was her conception of high-bred simplicity. It had been the Boston standard in the days when the Back Bay was still a bay, and not a mesh of handsome but obtrusive streets; it was still, thank God, the standard of Old Cambridge. She liked to feel that she had the very best of everything, but that no one knew it but herself.

"What display!" Mrs. Vassall said again, as Petrina descended from the carriage. "Who can she be?"

Vassall was in New York. He had gone directly thither from Ashuelot, where he had lingered till the latest moment. Mrs. Vassall, therefore, did not know

that Petrina and her mother had returned to town. They had, in fact, arrived in Beacon Street only the night before, and Petrina was taking the earliest possible moment to make her future mother-in-law's acquaintance.

The house stood back from the street, but there was no drive-way by which to approach it; there was only the straight garden-path, with an old-fashioned border of box.

As Petrina advanced Mrs. Vassall looked out with growing disapproval. This tall young woman, with the long but graceful tread, and the curious, delicate, sphinx-like face, was the very embodiment of that new Boston from which Mrs. Vassall shrank—the Boston in which gold and silver and gems and color had taken the place of books and quiet living and deep thinking and strict principles.

"What display!" Mrs. Vassall said a third time, as she noted the points of Petrina's costume.

But here she was unjust, for Petrina was dressed very quietly—all in black, with pretty touches of red. Only, there were graceful plumes in her hat, and over her shoulders there was something long and soft and feathery; while in her whole appearance there was that effect of subdued elegance which bespeaks money, taste, and much thought given to details.

When, a moment later, the servant brought a card with the name "Miss Faneuil," Mrs. Vassall required some few seconds to adjust her mind to the surprise. Being a good woman, she at once rebuked herself for hasty judgment and lack of charity.

"One must not go by mere appearances," she said; "she is young, and we should make allowances. When she is Henry's wife this display will doubtless be toned down."

So she smoothed her hair, and picked a few white threads from her severe black gown, and made ready to descend.

In the meantime Petrina was making a few observations on her own account. The day was chilly; the drive had been long; and she was not in the best of humors.

"Why should any one ever live in Cambridge?" she said peevishly to herself, as she crossed the bridge over the Charles. "It is like going outside the pale of human fellowship."

Her mood softened a little as she passed into the embowered roads of the University town itself—that pretty, overgrown village, set amid gardens, and Gothic-arched in green. The October sunlight, slanting through the yellowing elms, lit up the red of the Harvard halls, half hidden by climbing vines now dyed in all the hues of autumn.

Petrina came so seldom in this direction that she looked about with interest.

"It just misses being impressive," she thought, as she glanced across the Harvard Yard. "The common and commercial have been allowed to encroach too far upon the dignified and scholastic. The air is too noisy; the aspect too utilitarian. With two centuries of age, and considerable beauty, there is not enough repose."

It was the habit of the fastidious and self-satisfied world in which Petrina lived to sum up great undertakings in a few criticising phrases—a little praise tempered with much disparagement. Having thus disposed of Harvard, she turned her thought elsewhere.

As her carriage rolled onward her mood began to change. She had set out from home with the feeling that she was performing a graceful, almost a condescending, act. She was a young woman paying a

delicate attention to an old one; that, from Petrina's point of view, was inseparable from a sense of pretty patronage. Then, she was a rich, handsome, and fashionable girl, whose society was courted and personality admired, coming, with what was meant to look like eagerness, to press the hand and perhaps to kiss the cheek of one who was living in the background. Petrina naturally expected her graciousness to be received with gratitude. Up to the present Mrs. Vassall had been to her a negation—one who would not have required a second thought if Vassall had not spoken about her. Petrina was making this call to please him. It was a duty rather than a pleasure, and was of no permanent significance.

But as she threaded one after another of the shady Old Cambridge streets the negative began to be more positive. She was conscious of a mental atmosphere quite different from that of the Back Bay. The rows of quiet houses standing amid spacious grounds, the general air of unostentatious plenty and of occupied tranquillity, struck her as suggestive of other aims and other standards and other points of view than any she had made her own. She had an uncomfortable sense of being among people to whom her beauty and elegance would make no appeal—who would not admit the grounds on which she claimed the right to be placed first, and would look in her for merits she had never meant to cultivate.

For the first time she began to wonder if it was not this Cambridge influence which had given Vassall his distinction from the other men she had known, his strange ardor for ideals, and his curious indifference to externals. For the first time she began to ask if Mrs. Vassall herself might not be a power to be reckoned with.

This suspicion deepened as she drew up before the great white-and-yellow house—a combination of semi-Southern veranda and semi-classical façade, anomalous but effective.

"How stupid not to have a drive-way and a porte-cochère!" thought Petrina, only too ready to find fault.

The house was considered by Western tourists to be an interesting survival of pre-revolutionary taste; the garden was thought quaint. Petrina gave them only one carelessly comprehensive glance.

"It might be tolerable for a week in spring," she thought. "At any other time it would be burial alive."

When she entered the house she could not but admire its simple eighteenth-century dignity, with its high, moulded ceilings, its generous staircase, and its sense of space.

"There is an ancestral air about it," she confessed. "Something might be made of it."

But here her approval ended. As she looked about her in the great drawing-room, into which she had been shown, her taste, sensitive to styles, was shocked.

"What a *bourgeois* lack of discrimination!" she remarked; and this was true.

There were boule cabinets, Empire sofas, Sheraton tables, and Chippendale chairs, scattered amid hideous bits of modern, machine-made furniture covered in red plush. Over the chimney-piece, carved in pretty garlands, was a Copley portrait flanked by two large framed photographs of sacred pictures in the Louvre. Eighteenth-century pastels balanced steel-engravings, dating from the sixties, of Joan of Arc offering her sword upon the altar and Henry V. trying on his father's crown. The grand piano was as much out of date as a harpsichord, but on it was the only touch in the room of the progressive present day. It was a large

photograph of Lady de Bohun in all the feathers and fashion of her last court dress.

"I don't wonder Emmy revolted against all this incongruity," Petrina thought. "This must be the old New England one has heard about—when people read philosophy and didn't dress for dinner; when they travelled for information, and made notes on the celebrities whom they met."

But as she heard Mrs. Vassall's step upon the polished staircase Petrina checked her feeling of undefined hostility, and got herself ready to be gracious.

When the door opened there was just an instant in which the ladies stood looking at each other. It was like two aspects of American civilization come suddenly face to face. Petrina took the initiative and went forward with a rustle of silk, and long, soft, feline tread.

"I have come early," she said, holding out both hands to Mrs. Vassall, "because I couldn't wait. I wanted to see you so!"

"You are before me," Mrs. Vassall replied, taking Petrina's hands in hers, "only because I didn't know you had returned to town."

There were rising tears in Mrs. Vassall's soft blue eyes as she lifted them to the girl's dark ones. Petrina saw whence Emilia de Bohun had inherited her delicate but enduring beauty.

"You must let me kiss you," Mrs. Vassall said, and Petrina stooped.

"Let me look at you," Mrs. Vassall continued. "Come nearer to the light."

She led Petrina towards a window.

"My son has said so much about you," she went on, "and yet I do not know you. It is so hard to judge from mere descriptions."

Petrina felt that the tear-bedimmed blue eyes were

scanning her with intelligent penetration; but she was accustomed to be studied, and remained self-possessed. She looked for some expression of dignified approval, but Mrs. Vassall, on releasing the girl's hands, only said:

"Won't you sit down? We can talk better so."

She led the way to one of the Empire sofas, and they sat down side by side, turning towards each other.

"It is so difficult to judge from mere descriptions," Mrs. Vassall said again.

"I hope you will not be disappointed in me," said Petrina, though she had no fear of producing that effect.

"I should never be disappointed with Henry's choice," Mrs. Vassall responded, with gentle pride.

Petrina had a little nervous movement. She was not used to being rated as "Henry's choice."

"And yet the best of men are liable to make mistakes," Petrina replied, speaking with vague aggressiveness. "Perhaps when you know me better—"

Mrs. Vassall smiled.

"I know how you feel, dear," she interrupted, taking Petrina's hand and patting it. "I know how you feel. When one has been singled out by a man like Henry one is naturally conscious of one's own unworthiness."

"Very," said Petrina, dryly.

"But is not the sense of one's weakness a stimulus to greater striving?"

"I am not sure that I could precisely strive—"

"Oh yes, you can, dear," Mrs. Vassall interrupted, smiling. She liked what she thought Petrina's modesty. "We all feel that way at first, but we succeed at last. And you will, too. Henry is strict, but he is not exacting. He is like his father in that."

"I am not much accustomed to taking other people's

wishes into consideration," Petrina managed to say at last. She was annoyed with herself for the crude self-assertion of the speech, but Mrs. Vassall took it in another sense.

"No, I suppose not, dear. As an only child, and in some measure independent, others have hitherto thought for you, rather than you for them. But you will find the active part of life so much richer than the passive."

"So I should imagine, but—"

"But you fear your own inability to meet the demands that will be made upon you? Naturally. All good women do on the eve of marriage. But you will have Henry's love and guidance, and I hope you will remember that, if any counsel or sympathy of mine can help you, I shall never have any wish so dear as to be of service to both you and him."

It was quite clear now to Petrina that she was in an entirely new world. The negative *had* become positive. The mother, who had been but a shadow, was assuming with each word a personality. Petrina continued to smile; her tone was soft; her gestures were gentle; but within she was annoyed. She had lost the sense of patronage with which she had set out. This prim little Puritan, whose simple dignity and middle-aged prettiness were admirably heightened by the severity of her plain black attire, had a presence quite equal to Petrina's own. She might live out of what Petrina called "the world"; she might be quite unfashionable; she might not heed the difference between "Chippendale" and "Empire," nor pay any attention to the art of hanging pictures; but she was not a woman who could be left with affectionate neglect to her knitting and the chimney-corner. Petrina grew at once aware of that. She had a renewed sense of being judged by

a standard which was not what she had set up. She was conscious that her beauty was producing no effect, that she was before a tribunal where her costume and manners and perfection of external detail would pass unheeded in the search for the things of the soul.

"You must not think that I should ever intrude upon you," Mrs. Vassall went on gently, as Petrina made no reply to the offer of maternal help. "A husband and wife must learn to live their own life together. Only their intimate and sacred experience with each other will teach them when to yield and when to stand firm, and how each can supply what the other lacks. I fully understand that."

"Of course," said Petrina, vaguely.

"And yet I think that no young woman can quite do without the help and sympathy of an older one."

"That is no doubt often true," Petrina assented, politely.

"Always true, dear—at least I have found it so with my girls."

"Your—?"

"My girls, dear. I mean my Friendship girls. Didn't you know I was the head of the Girl's Guild of Friendship? I suppose Harry didn't think of telling you. It is my work, and a most interesting one. Some day I hope you will know more about it. Perhaps you will become one of our Companions."

Mrs. Vassall smiled with gentle confidence and continued to pat Petrina's hand.

"What is it?" Petrina asked, still vaguely. "Do they have subscription dances, or a cotillon in a hall? I think the younger girls have something of the sort in Boston."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Vassall, a little shocked. "They are only working girls, but such good girls! You

would be deeply interested in them, I am sure. We try to teach them to be simple and industrious, to have good manners and good morals, to be helpful to each other and faithful to the Church."

"Oh!" exclaimed Petrina, softly, apparently shocked on her side. "I couldn't do that."

She did not mean to be so blunt, but the sentence slipped out before she could control herself.

"You couldn't—?" began Mrs. Vassall.

"No, no, Mrs. Vassall, I couldn't, really."

"But why? It is such a noble work."

"Of course," Petrina hurried on, vexed with herself, but more vexed with Mrs. Vassall. "Of course it is a noble work. But I—I never interest myself in anything of that kind."

"That is, you feel shy," the older woman said, encouragingly. "But you will get over that. Many of our younger women hesitate at first, but with a little experience—"

"I beg that you will not count on me for anything like that," said Petrina, with quiet decision. "I have no taste at all for philanthropy."

"This is less a philanthropic than a religious work."

"But I am not of your religion."

Petrina smiled prettily in order to soften the effect of her words, but Mrs. Vassall started with surprise.

"You mean," she began, slowly, "that you are not a churchwoman?"

"No, Mrs. Vassall, I am not."

There was in Petrina's voice that slightly defiant ring that belongs to religious affirmations and denials. To Mrs. Vassall the moment was dramatic. A Vassall who was not a churchman seemed as impossible as a pope who was not a Catholic.

"Then you are a Unitar—?"

"No," Petrina interrupted, hastily — "not that, either."

"Then what are you?"

Mrs. Vassall's gaze, manner, and utterance were intense. For her the question had an importance which Petrina divined but partially.

"Nothing," said the girl, quietly, lowering her eyes. "I have no religion."

Petrina spoke firmly, but kept the vibration of defiance out of her tone. Mrs. Vassall mistook the note for that of sadness. Holding one of Petrina's hands, she now seized the other.

"Oh, my poor child!" she cried, in a burst of genuine motherly pity. "How you have been neglected! How you have been deprived of care and guidance! It is so often thus with orphan girls. But we will help you, dear. We will teach you. We will surround you with the good influences you have not had. When you see things as we see them you will find how much beauty—"

At the word beauty Petrina's eyes wandered slowly around the great, incongruously furnished room; but Mrs. Vassall continued to speak eagerly, almost passionately, for the faith of which Petrina had professed her ignorance. The girl listened with politeness, but with increasing coldness. At last she rose with an air of curt but courteous dismissal of the subject.

"I must not keep you any longer now," she said. "It is so delightful to talk all these things out with you. Some other day we shall have, perhaps, another chat about them."

Mrs. Vassall, as a woman of tact, accepted with good grace the abrupt termination put to her discourse.

"You will not go without having seen the house?" she asked, trying to master her emotion, and rising as she spoke.

"I am afraid I haven't time to-day," said Petrina, eager to be gone.

"Then you must come soon again. Harry will want you to go over it and suggest what changes you would like to have made."

"I? Why should I have changes made?" Petrina asked, in some astonishment.

"Oh, you will find them needed. It is an old house, you know."

"But I shall not live here?"

Petrina's tone was one of mingled inquiry and declaration. It seemed to ask if any one were likely to expect her to make her home there, and at the same time to say that, if so, he was wrong.

"I have my own house," Petrina continued.

"The Vassalls have lived here for upward of two centuries," Mrs. Vassall said, with quiet dignity. "Harry would never consent to live elsewhere."

They both smiled and said no more about the matter; but the gauntlet was thrown down between them. They kissed each other again, and expressed the pleasure they had had in meeting. Then Petrina managed to depart.

"What display!" Mrs. Vassall said, involuntarily, as Petrina's equipage dashed away.

But she checked herself and went up-stairs. She sat down again to the task from which her visitor had taken her, but she did not sew. She mused a little; then she cried a little; and then, kneeling down at her bedside, prayed a long, long while.

In the meantime Petrina was rolling back towards Boston in even less good humor than when she had set out. She questioned herself; she questioned the future. She foresaw that her supremacy over married life would demand a struggle; but at the thought of

contest her eyes flashed and her delicate nostrils quivered. She told herself that the fight would be between old-fashioned prejudice on the one side and her own enlightened liberality on the other. She was not the woman to recede before the fear of battle, and with regard to her own ideas she would neither yield, modify, nor concede.

CHAPTER VIII

In describing Petrina Faneuil as a pagan Puritan, Lechmere had spoken more wisely than he knew. She was pagan by inheritance and temperament; neither religious ideal nor spiritual creed had any place in her life. She was not hostile to faith; she was only aloof from it. She had neither knowledge nor need of it. She was aware that it existed, but it was no more to her than a love of landscape to a man born blind. It was something to which she felt herself superior. Its appeal to her was not more practical than that of a Wagner prelude to a sailor in a storm. She did not object to it; she would never have argued against it—not any more than she would have led a crusade against doing crochet-work or making rubbings from old tombs. She simply stood apart from it, as an indifferent spectator.

It was only when other people presented their religion as a pattern to which she should be expected to conform that Petrina felt irritated against it. Mrs. Vassall's gentle assumption of spiritual leadership aroused that sense of revolt which was always existent, even if latent, in the Faneuil blood.

For Petrina's separation from religious systems dated not merely from the parents who had chosen to be married and buried without sacred rites; it came from far back in her ancestral history. When the Barons de Faneuil first emerge into mediæval light they are already in conflict with the Church. For more than two centuries there was generally a Pierre de Faneuil in a

state of threatened or actual excommunication. It was natural that the Reformation should have found the family with the Huguenots; and it was not wholly strange that one of the race, bolder than his ancestors, should have pushed his way over the sea and joined himself to the men of another nation. They were alien to him in manners, speech, and blood, but they were "his own people" in the Lord. The last of the Barons, Pierre de Faneuil became thus the first of the Peter Faneuils.

But to a race as impatient of the minister as they had been of the pope, not even Puritan Massachusetts could give spiritual rest. The generations that grew up on New England soil were not seldom at variance with the accepted belief around them. Each new phase of religious thought, reactionary or radical, Trinitarian or Unitarian, was welcomed for a moment as a deliverance from every other, but the influence of no one system lasted long. From father to son the tendency towards individualism in belief grew stronger. Petrina's great-grandfather, nominally an Episcopalian, inclined towards rationalism in his later years. Her grandfather, nominally a Unitarian, became, before his death, an avowed free-thinker. Her father had been nothing. Petrina was nothing, too. Whatever religious instinct had ever been in the family had spent itself at least two generations before her time. She was a pagan—a tolerant, indifferent, slightly scornful pagan—who could not feel enough interest in the creeds which went by the name of Christ to be even opposed to them.

But she was none the less a Puritan. Certain of her ways of thought and habits of life had survived the beliefs which had given them birth, as an effect will often outlive its cause. If she was a pagan, she was a seri-

ous one, a pagan with a New England conscience. She was not without ideals, and was strict in living up to them. Aware that she was well dowered in beauty, intelligence, and wealth, she looked upon herself as the steward of those gifts, and held herself responsible for their use in doing good. But her notion of "good" was essentially non-Christian. It was part of her paganism that for the poor she had little pity, while for the sick she had only the sort of sympathy which sprang from the fear of some day suffering herself. Philanthropy was as far from her as was religion. She looked on and wondered when she saw her friends working in Associated Charities or College Settlements. Mrs. Vassall's Guilds of Friendship and parochial societies seemed to her grotesque.

And yet she had an idea of making herself useful, even though not in a way which would be specially commended by the Church. Her views were worldly, but, such as they were, she held them eagerly.

She saw herself a rich and free young woman placed by the hazards of descent in Boston; and, had it been possible, she would not have chosen her destiny elsewhere. She rarely thought of herself as an American; she was distinctly and before everything else a Bostonian. For her the great group of Federated States were but the pedestal which upholds the statue. Boston was her statue; Boston was her country. Her patriotism was a civic one, like that of the mediæval Venetian, Veronese, or Florentine. That there were other great cities in America she was aware; but they were Boston's intellectual or social tributaries. They might be larger or richer or busier, but they could never bear to Boston any other than the relation of Lyons or Liverpool to Rome.

And yet this civic pride was neither indiscriminate

nor blind. It was in the fact that she saw her city's social and intellectual defects that she found her mission. Like Mrs. Vassall, she perceived a wide difference between the new Boston and the old; only that, while for the elder woman the new was non-existent, for Petrina it was the only actual and vital. The old had passed away. The simple, dignified life which had produced Emerson and Hawthorne, Lowell, Longfellow, and Holmes—the life in which Mrs. Vassall still supposed she lived—was for Petrina irrevocably gone. In its place had come a larger, richer, more luxurious, more mixed, more pleasure-loving, and more free-and-easy society, in which the old New England elements, while still predominant, were in conflict with many distracting influences from outside.

Petrina was not content that her Boston should become like another Weimar, the memory of a great time gone by; she was not content that it should be only a successful contestant for commercial honors. As she saw the higher possibilities, they were greater now than ever; only there was a lack of united action and of social cohesion. There were all the elements of a society high-minded and highly bred, but they were not blended together. There was a dividing-up of forces into small, self-nicknamed bands. There was no society; there were only "sets"—with a tendency towards the arrogance and ignorance consequent upon living in a petty world. The young, to their deterioration, separated themselves from their elders; the elders, to their loss, were out of touch with the young. Between the married and the single a great gulf was fixed; while there was even a barrier between those who were young and married and those who were married and middle-aged. The father had little social contact with his son, and the mother almost none with her daughter. Children

were impatient of the presence of their parents; and parents permitted their children to run at large. There was a perceptible decline in social conscience, social honor, social morals; and minds and manners had suffered for the worse. What had been, and might still be, one of the most delightful societies in the world was, with increased opportunities, breaking up into factions, for want of a standard round which to concentrate.

That standard Petrina proposed to herself to set up. How she was to do it she had no very clear idea; but it satisfied her Puritan yearnings for beneficent activity to think that she might accomplish some amount of "good." She had no fixed programme, but she did not doubt that the way would become clear as she went on.

The first step was to be married. Petrina had a high opinion of the powers and position of her sex, but she never questioned the fact that she would be more important as a married woman than as a single one. It was humiliating but true that a Mrs. Vassall could be a greater social authority than a Miss Faneuil; though in her case the fact that she loved the man who was to be her husband softened what was trying in the fact.

It was nevertheless with some astonishment that she received Mrs. Vassall's counsels, which, as the autumn went on, were delivered by both the spoken and the written word. When the elder lady returned Petrina's call, her conversation turned wholly on what Henry liked to eat and wear and do, and the small arts it was necessary to practise to keep him in good humor. It was part of the sacrifice the mother was ready to make, that all the bits of precious information she had gleaned in three-and-thirty years of study of her son she was

ready to give to this woman who was taking him away. There was a brief instant when she had meant not to do so.

"Let her learn these things for herself," was the thought which had passed through her mind.

But she rejected the temptation with scorn of her own littleness.

"No; she shall know all. She shall begin where I leave off, and with every advantage."

So she poured out her treasures of motherly observation, laying them at Petrina's feet—Henry's taste in meals, his fastidiousness about his linen, and his fussiness when any one touched his papers. The little mother in her fashionless black bent forward in her chair, talking eagerly, while Petrina, all in floating lace, leaned back, half scornful and half amused at the thought that she must sit at Henry's feet and learn, or stand by in an attitude of service.

"He is as good a man as ever lived," said the mother, proudly, "but you'll have to humor him, my dear. Men are more or less like grown-up boys, and Henry is as the rest. He gets terribly impatient if dinner isn't ready promptly at half past six o'clock."

"We dine at eight," said Petrina, languidly.

"Oh, that will never do," Mrs. Vassall exclaimed, hastily. "But you will see that yourself," she added, with a faint smile. "He takes only the lightest lunch at his club, so that when he comes home he is very hungry. He goes to his lunch at one. One from eight is seven. Seven hours without food. It would be too long, my dear. You'll find it so, especially with his digestion."

"Must I have his digestion, too?" Petrina asked, with a smile.

But Mrs. Vassall, not understanding the remark,

went on to speak of some of Henry's other peculiarities in their relations to the household.

"You will excuse my jotting things down just as they occur to me," she wrote a few days later, "but one cannot think of everything in a half-hour's conversation. There is, however, one matter on which you never need have any anxiety. Henry always likes bacon and eggs for breakfast. He is particular about his coffee, and likes it strong; but I am sure you will find it simplifies matters only to have to plan for one meal a day, as he takes his lunch away from home. A young housekeeper must naturally," etc., etc.

The letter ended "Yours affectionately, Christina Vassall"; but there was a postscript:

"I am sure that we shall one day see eye to eye in matters of religion."

A few days later Mrs. Vassall wrote again:

"It occurs to me that, after my remarks the other day about Henry's linen, it may be a relief to you if I say that we know of a most admirable woman who exactly suits him in shirts and collars. She is Mrs. Mahoney, of Number 10 Egg Street. I have had such trouble with them hitherto; but you will find Mrs. Mahoney an excellent woman, and especially good with colored shirts, doing them in such a way that they do not fade —except, of course, the mauve ones."

The letter ended: "I do not apologize for giving you these details. Nothing is beneath a married woman's supervision. Besides, I know how earnestly you wish to please Henry and to make him a good and careful wife. Yours affectionately, Christina Vassall."

Again there was a postscript:

"Would you not like to come to one of our Wednesday evenings at the G. G. F.? I know you would be deeply interested in our girls."

Petrina kept these letters to herself. She acknowledged them curtly and locked them up. They presented to her a view of a marriage impossible and absurd. Written to her, they seemed as out of place as if they had been sent to the Queen on her marriage with Prince Albert. The semi-religious postscript, which never failed, was meant, she perceived, to be the gentle dropping which would wear away the stone of her unconverted heart; but the very futility of the process increased her scorn. She was at once too young, too impatient, and too proud to treat Mrs. Vassall's maternal anxieties with tenderness, humor, or forbearance.

She could more easily have done so had it been possible to continue thinking of Mrs. Vassall as a person of no importance. But the little lady, so fastidiously unobtrusive, had the power of impressing herself on those with whom she had to do. Petrina felt her to be not only a strong personality in herself, but a personality supported by world-wide usage and belief. If there was to be any struggle between them, it would be that of individualism with duty, of unconventionality with tradition, of will unfettered by restraints coming from the past with conscience guided by the counsels of a God-fearing experience.

Moreover, Petrina came to feel that, had Mrs. Vassall chosen, she could have equalled her on her own ground; that she could have wielded that social power which could be of such benefit to Boston. This revelation came on the first occasion on which Petrina and Mrs. Faneuil dined at the old house in Cambridge. Both ladies had accepted the invitation with the sense of fulfilling a tedious duty.

"It will be what they call in the country a high-tea," said Mrs. Faneuil, and so they wore gowns of only secondary importance in their wardrobes.

They found themselves mistaken. The spacious drawing-room, lit by many candles, had an air of old-world stateliness—the stateliness which is accustomed to itself, and does not seem to say, "Observe what a success taste and skill have made of me."

The guests were few but important—Pepperells and Vassalls whom every one knew by name, and who were equally at home in both hemispheres. The Pepperell and Vassall silver and porcelain, Petrina acknowledged, were more beautiful and more abundant than her own. Vassall, she saw with satisfaction, was the simplest, most tactful, and most considerate of hosts; but Mrs. Vassall was a surprise.

The fond mother who wrote of bacon and eggs and the washing of colored shirts was richly dressed in black brocade, with laces which caused Mrs. Faneuil and Petrina to exchange comprehending glances. She wore a few diamonds of which the settings were old-fashioned, but the stones themselves superb. She received her guests, not with the smiling anxiety of one who is making an effort to entertain, but with the ease of the woman of the world to whom the task is familiar. She directed the conversation tactfully, and almost imperceptibly. In her talk there was no reference to religion, or Guilds of Friendship, or any of the homely duties in which her soul was wrapped. She told anecdotes of the court of Queen Isabella, to which her father had been minister, and added reminiscences of the House of Savoy, whose members she had known when Mr. Pepperell had been removed to Turin. She talked with that pretty, unconscious brilliancy which, as Petrina remarked, Emmy de Bohun must have inherited with her beauty.

But the guests gone and the lights out, Mrs. Vassall took off her diamonds and folded up her laces and put

them all away. Then she began to think of more serious things. The dinner had been successful, but she was accustomed to such success. She received rarely now, but she had had much experience in times gone by. Mere entertaining never gave her any anxiety beforehand and but little satisfaction afterwards. It was among the trifles of life, and its success or failure was a matter of no consequence. She cared much more that her Wednesday evenings with "her girls" should pass off with satisfaction to all concerned, and she had never given so much thought to any function at the Legation at Madrid as she now spent every year on the annual reception given to the members of her parish church.

On the day following the dinner Petrina received a letter which, after the first formal "Dear Petrina," went on to say: "I had no opportunity to tell you last night what has long been on my mind. You will have to watch Henry very carefully in what he eats. For a strong man he has a most delicate digestion. He is foolishly fond of pastry, and you will find," etc., etc.

The postscript ran:

"You won't forget that you are coming out some time to hear Mr. Corbett preach. We shall expect you to stay to luncheon."

Petrina read the letter with renewed impatience. Her reply was courteous, but her decision was stronger than ever to consider in marriage no ideas but her own.

CHAPTER IX

It was, however, a satisfaction to find that Vassall was unaware of the correspondence of which he was the subject. Between Petrina and Mrs. Vassall there was a tacit understanding that their letters were confidential. Where men are concerned, women have an instinct for strategy; and a husband or a brother, while nominally doing as he wills, is often only working out the plans which well-meaning female relatives have made for him in secret. Even the woman who is treacherous to her sex in love or friendship is rarely other than loyal in matters of domestic conspiracy. And thus Petrina, while conscious of a growing exasperation towards the mother, was silent on the subject towards the son.

For in her opinion Vassall was a perfect lover.

"No one could bear himself better," she often said. Coming from her, the praise was high, for she acknowledged herself fastidious. She had tasted the mingled pleasure and pain of refusing many suitors, and she had made mental notes about them all. Love, she observed, sits strangely on the average Anglo-Saxon. He carries it as awkwardly as the ordinary citizen wears a fancy dress. It makes him self-conscious, unnatural, and ill at ease. For its expression our language has few words, and our habits fewer gestures. With such poverty of ready-made resources, the Anglo-Saxon lover has need of a grace and a tact which are scarcely native in order not to be grotesque.

There had been a period in Petrina's history when she fancied she should die an old maid for lack of some one who could fitly declare his passion. To more than one man's love-making she had been giving serious consideration until he had put himself beyond further thought by adopting an amatory style either stammering or stilted or theatrical or commonplace. There was a time when Mrs. Faneuil's hopes for Sir George Wallingford might have been fulfilled had he not said (while smoking a cigar and leaning on the taffrail of a yacht off Cannes), "Don't you think, dearest girl, that we might pull along together?" Sir George was an excellent young man, for whom Petrina had a certain fondness. Up to the last moment she had been in doubt, but the instant was decisive. She could never, she felt, "pull along" with any one; she could never respond to the epithet of "dearest girl"; above all, she could never marry a man, however excellent, who offered himself between two puffs of a cigar.

But Vassall was beyond her criticism. He was quiet, natural, and serious. His court was suggested rather than direct; his tone was intimate yet deferential; and his bearing easy, though that of a man passionately in love. To Petrina, who had the New England instinct for restraint, this was admirable. She saw no reason why they should not always live on this footing of distant familiarity; they might be courteous with each other, confidential even, but removed from any vulgar clashing of opinions and wills.

It was, therefore, as has been said, somewhat of a shock to her to find this impossible. A moment came when she began to realize that in marriage neither husband nor wife can always rule or always obey; that they cannot even revolve apart like neighboring stars.

When the new year had opened they began to talk of practical things. Petrina avoided this sort of discussion as much as possible. It seemed to bring them out of the ideal into the commonplace. It suggested, too, that she was entering into Vassall's life rather than he into hers. She disliked making plans with him; she preferred to express her wishes. She took it for granted that, as she was conferring all the favors (Vassall himself had said so many a time), it would be a sufficient career for him to carry her intentions out. He was so eager to serve her that she never wondered whether or not he had desires of his own. He gave her so large a place in his life that she was sure there was nothing of any consequence outside.

"I am going to startle you," she said, smiling, one evening early in the new year.

"That is so easily done," he replied, "that the sport is scarcely worth your prowess."

"When, however, there is no big game at hand, one keeps one's self in practice by shooting at a target."

"In my capacity of target, I may remark that you invariably hit the bull's-eye."

"Does it hurt?"

"*Mit süsser Pein* only."

"Then I need have no compunction?"

"Not for any such arrows of wit or irony as you have aimed against me hitherto. I have a good deal of stolidity, you know."

"I have observed it in you—"

"As a virtue, I hope?"

"As one of the qualities I like. It is negative, but strong, and it offers me a background."

"If it is all the same to you I would rather be a background than a target."

"You must be both. I expect my husband to stand

before me as the object of my favor, and behind me as a foil."

"To be in two places at once, like the Irishman's bird."

"He must know how to be present without indiscretion, and absent without being missed. Like Charity, he must learn to bear all things, endure all things—"

"And hope all things, I presume."

"Not too much, otherwise he is likely to be disappointed. In marriage it is wisest to be prepared for the worst; one is then quite grateful for second-best, which is the average of what one receives."

"Is this cynical sentiment the shock of which you warned me?"

"Not at all. It is only the preliminary to its infliction."

"Then may I beg not to be kept longer in suspense?"

"Are your nerves steady?"

"Not very, but, all the same, let me know the worst."

"I have decided to be married on a Friday."

Vassall looked at her with smiling incredulity. They were in the library of Petrina's house in Beacon Street. The room was large and luxurious. The walls were well lined with books, and the only picture was the full-length portrait of Petrina's father—painted by Hunt. A few marble busts stood in corners, while on the tables were some of Barye's bronzes. A cheerful wood fire was burning in the chimney. Petrina and Vassall sat before the bright blaze, while between them stood a table on which were the after-dinner coffee, liqueurs, and cigarettes. Mrs. Faneuil had discreetly left them to themselves.

"Why on a Friday?" Vassall asked. "I thought

it was the one impossible day. Is your decision meant to be a challenge to superstition?"

"Friday is my lucky day. First of all, I was born on a Friday—"

"Then it is my lucky day, too."

"Then my father and mother were married on a Friday. You and I met for the first time on a Friday; and the day by the lake at Ashuelot last autumn was a Friday, too."

Petrina said the last words softly, and one of the rare blushes stole over her dark cheek. Vassall leaned forward and took her hand.

"Then Friday let it be," he said, gently.

"You are not shocked?"

"Enough to satisfy your love of shocking, not enough to make me rebel against your decree."

"And I am thinking of a particular Friday," she went on. Her mood had gradually softened from that of banter to the quiet seriousness in which she was at her best.

"It happens, curiously enough," she continued, "that this year the anniversary of my father's and mother's wedding falls on a Friday again. I can't quite explain to you what this means to me. You would probably think it trivial. But when one cannot remember one's mother and can barely recall one's father, their memory takes a large place in the more serious portion of one's life. My thoughts about them are a mingling of pride and piety. I often think that, having no other religion, I have something of the Chinese reverence for one's ancestors. The very fact that I cannot feel for my parents the simple love that would have come from having lived with them makes it a matter of filial duty to connect them as much as may be with the important moments of my life."

"I quite understand that."

"I owe them so much; not only birth, but name and honor and means and so much besides. And all I can do for them is to think of them, to commemorate them, so to speak, by linking the events of my life to those of theirs. It has been to me a matter of something more than sentiment to think that if I ever married it should be upon their wedding-day."

"Which falls on—?"

"The first Friday in April."

Vassall bent his head and kissed her hand.

"There is something else I wish to say," Petrina went on as Vassall raised himself. Then she paused.

"Yes? I am listening."

"No; not to-night," she added, with a sudden change of tone. "We have talked enough for the present. One step at a time is the surest method of going on."

Vassall had enough to think of and did not insist.

"The first Friday in April," he said to himself as he went homewards. "Only two months now; and yet so long to wait."

CHAPTER X

"THE first Friday in April," Vassall said next morning at breakfast, in reply to his mother.

He did not look up, but he was conscious of her eyes fixed upon him in cold surprise.

"The first Friday?" she exclaimed. "A Friday? You mean that Petrina wishes to be married on a—? Oh, it is impossible, Harry! You must have made a mistake. No girl in her senses—"

Vassall repeated what Petrina had said of Friday as her lucky day.

"Extraordinary," was Mrs. Vassall's only comment. "But isn't it in Lent?" she asked, after a slight pause. "And isn't it—? Yes, I am almost sure it is."

She rose quickly and left the room. Vassall guessed her meaning, and waited anxiously for her return. When she re-entered she was examining the first pages of a Book of Common Prayer.

Vassall rose and looked over her shoulder.

"Here it is," she said, her voice trembling with repressed excitement. "April 5th, Good Friday. You can't be married on Good Friday."

"No, of course not," he assented. "She couldn't have thought of it."

"You didn't know," he said to Petrina after dinner on the same day—"you didn't know that Good Friday falls this year in the first week in April?"

"Does it?" she asked, indifferently.

"It will interfere, therefore, with the date you have

fixed for our wedding. It didn't occur to me till my mother reminded me of it."

Petrina lifted her head haughtily. She was conscious of a rising sense of anger. She had again the feeling of being in conflict with some force of whose nature and name she was ignorant. She called it sometimes religion, sometimes conventionality, sometimes provinciality, but it was too indefinable to seize. It was personified for her in Vassall's mother, with her deliberate asceticism and housekeeping piety; but it was like a mysterious power blocking her way. It seemed to say, "You are Petrina Faneuil and nominally free; but you shall do nothing except as others have done it before you. You shall not sweep through life over some highway of your own; you shall creep through all the well-worn by-paths along which alone you are expected."

Up to the present she had never gone beyond the beaten track of travel, pleasure, and youth. In her engagement and marriage she was striking out more boldly. It was therefore a rude surprise to be told that even the rich and the young in this sophisticated world are less like nomads, free to wander at will, than like prisoners, obliged to walk by routine and in companies. Since the day of her first visit to Mrs. Vassall at Cambridge this fact had been presented to her from so many points of view that she was compelled to reflect upon it; but it was always with renewed determination to force circumstances to her will.

It was this very reflection which caused her present anger. Hitherto she had chafed in secret. Now she had received an open check. She was told that something she had very near at heart could not be allowed. Had she been in the mind for introspection she would have seen that never in her life had she been

so angry as now. Had she been able to analyze her emotions she would have perceived that, beneath the impatient assertion that she should do precisely as she pleased, there was a common-sense sub-consciousness that she could not be married on Good Friday. She knew already that she was holding a position from which she should be obliged to retire, but for the moment her judgment was overborne by the determination not to yield.

"Why should it make any difference?"

Her voice shook a little, in spite of her effort after self-control.

"We couldn't be married on Good Friday, you know."

He spoke as a man stating a fact too obvious for argument.

"Why not?"

"Because we couldn't. It isn't possible."

"Isn't that what you would call a woman's reason?"

"Perhaps, but it sums up all the reasons there are."

"It doesn't appeal to me."

"But, dear Petrina, you never heard of any one being married on Good Friday."

"I have never taken the trouble to observe; but I fancy that if you were to look at one of last year's papers of the morning following that day you would find that there are people in the world to whom your new moons and sabbaths mean nothing at all."

"Doubtless there are such people, but not of our sort."

"Not of yours, perhaps, but of mine."

She spoke in her usual low voice, and looked at him with a smile. She was sure of herself now, and knew that she could carry on the discussion without any ill-bred show of annoyance. Vassall himself was de-

ceived by her calmness. He, too, smiled, not suspecting the intensity of her feeling. He took it for granted that with a little explanation she would see the matter as he did.

He threw the end of his cigarette into the fire, and looked at her with steady gentleness. Petrina took a hand-screen and shaded her face, protecting herself less from the firelight than from his quiet gaze.

"I know," he said, softly, "that you don't think as we do in matters of religion. You and I have never talked of that, and, if we ever do, you will be the one to begin. I want you to feel quite free—"

"Thanks. I am not accustomed to feel otherwise."

"I want you to feel quite free," he went on, paying no attention to this shot, "to speak on the subject or to be silent. Some day, perhaps, as we grow nearer together, you will be able to enter into my feelings more easily than now."

Petrina shook her head.

"How strong," she thought, "the missionary instinct is in all these people! Even in Harry it is showing itself at last."

"You are like your mother," she said, aloud.

"Of course we can't help hoping—"

"Then please don't," she interrupted, with an impatient movement of the hand-screen. In the act Vassall saw that she was slightly flushed.

"Please don't," she repeated. "I have no instinct of that sort. To my mind religion is a taste like any other—like a love of music or a fancy for collecting postage-stamps. I shall never share it; I shall never even understand it. For me the subject is of no importance. Don't try to force it on me, Harry, because it would be labor thrown away."

"I should never think of doing so."

"Then we shall consider our wedding day fixed for the first Friday in April."

"I can't say that, dear. You yourself will see it on reflection. Whatever our private beliefs may be, the fact remains that we live in a Christian land—"

"Do we? I didn't know it. That circumstance, at least, has never been unduly urged upon me."

"And," he went on, "we have no right to offend public opinion by choosing for our marriage the one day which is least suitable."

"In England Good Friday is the day when the cricket season opens. In France it used to be the day when women of society drove in the Bois to inaugurate the fashions for the coming year. In this country it has never been any day at all."

"It is, at least, a great anniversary."

"Yes, for me. You seem to have forgotten that."

"No, dear; I do not forget it. But for us the commemoration is more than that of any private or family event."

"And yet private and family events are those which touch us most closely."

"Not always."

"Not always, perhaps; but certainly here. Good Friday, as you call it, is, if I remember rightly, the conventional—not the real—anniversary of the day on which the founder of your Church was crucified. He is at best a far-away and mysterious personage, who is nothing to me, and, I should think, very little to you."

"You don't understand, dear," he began, but she would not be interrupted.

"He died many centuries ago. Your grief for that occurrence cannot be extreme. I question if, as the day comes round each year, you and your fellow-believers give much more thought than I do to what is

supposed to have taken place on Calvary. If you have any emotion at all it is probably fictitious and conventional; but I venture to think it isn't even that."

"The significance of the day is not in our feeling, but in what we consider to be a great redemptive fact."

"I should be better able to follow you there if I saw that Christians themselves laid any emphasis upon it."

"More, perhaps, than you think."

"Very likely. I will not dispute you. The question is nothing to me. I am trying only to point out that while the day I have fixed for our marriage is for you an occasion of only simulated feeling, it is for me one which touches the most sensitive fibres of my life."

Nevertheless, as they talked on, it was more and more with the understanding that Vassall's decision would be the final one. Unconsciously Petrina found herself speaking as though she had given way. It was as if she had been carried down by a strong but gentle tide. She was so little used to opposition that when it came it took her by surprise. She even allowed him to depart without assuring him that her mind was still unchanged. He did not suspect that she was hurt. A man has less often than a woman the impulse to look behind appearances. Vassall took facts as he found them, and went his way homeward, pleased with himself and her.

"Poor little thing," he thought, "it was hard for her to give up her mother's wedding-day, but how pluckily and prettily she did it!"

But a little later, after she had changed her evening dress for a robe that floated and fell about her like some long, lace-like mountain cascade, Petrina slipped into her stepmother's bedroom. It was not late, and Mrs. Faneuil, also comfortably clad in something soft

and gorgeous, like a sunset cloud, was in the act of stamping the letters she had just written and addressed.

"Is Mr. Vassall gone?"

"Obviously," said Petrina, crossly. "Do you suppose I have left him down-stairs?"

"I didn't know," Mrs. Faneuil replied, calmly. "I am always finding your belongings in unexpected places."

"He isn't my property yet."

"But so soon to be!"

"That remains to be seen."

"The fifth of April will not be long in coming round."

"Did you know it was Good Friday?"

"Good gracious!" Mrs. Faneuil exclaimed, as she rose from her writing-table and came where Petrina was seated before the fireplace. "I never thought of it. Did you?"

"No."

"How tiresome!"

"Why? What has it to do with us?"

Petrina was in one arm-chair. Mrs. Faneuil sank into another.

"It has everything to do with us. You can't possibly be married on Good Friday."

"But I mean to be."

"Then there is no more to be said. I shall be at your wedding, of course; but there will be no one else there."

This was a new idea to Petrina, and it struck her forcibly. She had little intention of being married inconspicuously. With no vulgar wish for display, she took it for granted that anything less than a handsome and representative gathering of Boston's best would be unworthy of the nuptials of the head of the house of Faneuil. Besides, it was thus that she secretly meant

to inaugurate her social reign. Her wedding was to be the first of those events which were in time to re-unite Boston's scattered social forces. As she thought over Mrs. Faneuil's words, her annoyance became anxiety.

"Do you think many would stay away?" she asked, after a few minutes' reflection.

"I think every one would stay away. It would be considered most extraordinary."

"I shouldn't mind that if they would only come."

"But who would come? Just think. Certainly the Hammerfields wouldn't be there."

"I could do without their benediction."

"Nor the Longswords."

"I should be sorry for that, but—"

"You could do without them, too?"

"Precisely."

"And you could do without the Skeffingtons, and the Marchbanks, and the Fenboroughs, and the Ripley Brownes. Mind you, I'm counting only the Episcopalians."

"But there are hosts of Unitarians to whom one day would be the same as another."

"There you are wrong. I am a Unitarian myself."

"*Mais si peu.*"

"*Si peu*, if you like, but still enough to know how they feel. For all those ecclesiastical days they are getting to be as bad as the Episcopalians. I think it is quite right, too. I remember distinctly that in the Newbury Street Church last year they kept Good Friday on the Sunday before, and on Easter day the pulpit was banked with flowers. No, there wouldn't be even a Unitarian at your wedding, Petrina. You may take my word for it, and there is nothing so dreary as an empty church."

"But I am not going to be married in a church."

Mrs. Faneuil sat straight up in her chair, and looked a little aghast.

"Do you mean," she said, speaking slowly and with tragic emphasis, "that the service is to be performed in a parlor, under a floral bell?"

Petrina shuddered.

"No, not that."

"Then what?"

"I haven't decided yet," she faltered.

"I am glad of that," said Mrs. Faneuil, dryly. "If you have not decided, there is still hope."

"I had not meant to have any religious service at all."

Mrs. Faneuil sank back again into her chair with a dramatic air of weariness.

"You think of being hand-fasted, perhaps?"

Petrina did not reply.

"Or do you mean to go before a justice of the peace? I believe that is sometimes done, especially among the lower classes."

"I haven't thought out the details."

"So I should suppose."

"I want to be married as my mother was. She must have been absolutely sincere. She would have at her wedding nothing in which she did not believe."

"I remember."

"She would have no meaningless ceremony; she would take no self-insulting vows; she refused even the empty symbolism of a wedding-ring."

"I can tell you all about it. I was only a young girl at the time, but I had my wits about me."

"I want to do as she did, not merely because I hold her opinions, but because I cherish her memory."

"Certainly, dear. You are wholly right. But it ought to be within the limits of the practical."

"But I see no insurmountable difficulty—"

"You should remember that your mother's views about life were wholly different from yours. She lived at a time when public opinion was in a ferment about many things concerning which it is now either indifferent or inactive. The Boston to which she belonged was not that of to-day. She was one of the last of those who had been the Transcendentalists. She was too late for Brook Farm, but just in time for *The Origin of Species* and the first Agnosticism. She was as pretty as a picture and as clever as Margaret Fuller. Before she was married her little group of followers looked upon her as the apostle of a new movement. I don't know just what the movement was, but it was very radical and enthusiastic. Almost everybody got into a state of 'honest doubt,' as they called it, and advertised the loss of religious convictions. The fewer they had to lose the more they talked about them; and the less they understood the teachings of Darwin and Comte and Herbert Spencer the more they hurled them at your head. The young men especially posed dreadfully—"

"I am sure my mother never posed."

"No; she at least was in earnest. So was your poor father, though his ardor cooled down in later life. I think the movement got its first blow when they became engaged. The little group to whom your mother was a prophetess showed at once a tendency to break up. Its members rallied a little for her wedding, which was made an exposition of their teachings, but their real earnestness was gone. The worst was that, after her marriage, your poor mother became like anybody else. She had fought for woman's independence of man, and then couldn't bear your father out of her sight. She wouldn't say the word *obey* when they were married, and then simply lived to carry out his orders. She re-

fused a wedding-ring, but the one he gave her afterwards never left her finger, and she wore it to her grave."

"Her convictions, however, didn't change."

"No, perhaps not. But they were convictions for which in those days the people who held them supposed they had to fight. It was the part of courage to stand to one's guns. But who cares about such ideas now?"

"Many people, I fancy."

"Yes, but not you, nor I, nor Mr. Vassall, nor any of our friends. The same questions may still be burning in remote country places and in the women's clubs, but not here in Beacon Street, nor among people like ourselves. They may deal with highly important subjects for aught I know, but they are terribly *vieux jeu*."

Petrina shuddered again. She had not seen the matter in this light before.

"I always meant to be married as my mother was," she said, for want of other argument. "Do you remember what it looked like?"

"The ceremony? Yes; it was in a hall. I was there with my father and mother. I distinctly recall that it was very brief and businesslike. George Curtois, the Positivist—Frederic Harrison's friend—performed the service, if service it could be called; and there was some sort of magistrate to make the ceremony legal. Your mother wouldn't have bridesmaids, because they implied that a woman was weak and needed attendance; neither would she wear a veil, because the veil was typical of woman's shyness and seclusion. She was bewitching, however, in a plum-colored walking costume made with an overskirt and panniers; and she wore a plum-colored turban. What the occasion lacked was something sentimental and picturesque. You may spend all your taste and energy on a function of

that kind, and yet it will always be gaunt and colorless as compared with a wedding in a church."

"But when one doesn't believe in churches?"

"I understood that Mr. Vassall did."

"Oh, yes, he—"

"He doesn't count, perhaps."

"He would naturally do as I wished."

Petrina said this boldly, but with an unpleasant twinge of doubt.

"In that case you have only to make your own plans. You may count on my aid in carrying your wishes out. But if you want anything like a real wedding—"

"I do want that, of course."

"Then I should abandon, if I were you, all thought of going back to the early seventies, or of being married on Good Friday. I can't yet understand how Henry Vassall, with all his Episcopalian connection, could have agreed to the proposition."

"He didn't."

"Then how—?"

"I shall have to insist. That's all."

Mrs. Faneuil sat for some minutes looking at her stepdaughter in silence.

"Do you know, Petrina," she asked at last, "why a wedding is like a quarrel?"

"Is it a riddle, mamma?"

"Yes, and home-made."

"I'm afraid I shall have to ask you for the answer."

"Because it takes two to make it. It is a riddle with a moral."

"Pointed at me?"

"Straight. You talk of getting married as though you were the only person concerned. You seem to forget that there is to be a bridegroom who may have wishes of his own."

"I don't forget it. He has many wishes, but they can all be expressed in one."

"Which is to please you, I suppose?"

"I haven't said so, but if you choose to think it—"

"I? I don't think anything of the kind. Your Henry is the meekest of men—so long as it suits him. He is like the bishop of whom it was said that a little child could lead him—the way he wanted to go. Don't try any experiments on him."

"There is no need to. I am sure beforehand."

"Of Good Friday?"

"Practically."

"Then don't insist upon it. I question the good taste, not to say the wisdom, of such a step. It would surely be repugnant to his mother, if not to him."

"But I am not marrying his mother."

"Oh yes, you are. There is a sense in which you are marrying the whole family—every Vassall and Pepperell among them."

"Don't, mother!"

"You may groan, my child, but I'm telling you the truth. People cannot marry to themselves alone. As an institution, matrimony is most inclusive. When Mr. Vassall marries you he, in some sort, marries me. I shall be his mother-in-law, and shall refuse myself none of the pleasures of the position. In marrying him you make Mrs. Vassall yours. You give her certain rights—"

"Oh, mamma, spare me!" Petrina cried, rising and beginning to move nervously about the room.

"I may spare you, but your future relations won't. If you choose to marry among them, you give them the right to expect from you a certain line of conduct. You mustn't begin by deliberately running counter to all their cherished prejudices and pet convictions."

Petrina came up behind Mrs. Faneuil and slipped her arm over the elder woman's shoulder.

"I don't believe," she said, "that it is worth while taking the trouble to have a stepmother who *can* be so nice and who *is* so—"

"I will excuse you the other adjective, my dear. I never cared for antithesis of that kind. But you see again that it is the effect of marriage. When I took your father, I took you. Now we've got to make the best of each other."

Petrina stooped and laid her hot cheek on her mother's soft brown hair.

"Well," she said, wearily, "I suppose I had better break off my engagement."

"Perhaps that would be wiser," Mrs. Faneuil assented complacently, rising as she spoke.

"There never was any one quite so unsatisfactory as you, mamma," Petrina cried, clasping her hands behind her mother's neck and looking down into her eyes. "That wasn't at all your cue. You should have opposed me. Then I would have broken it off. Now I sha'n't. I shall go on with it."

"There is one thing I should certainly do in your place."

"Something unpleasant, I suppose," said Petrina, moving away again.

"I should go to bed and try to sleep myself into a healthy, conventional frame of mind, and get up in the morning thinking like other people."

"But I'm not like other people."

"More's the pity. It's your chief defect."

"And I hate the conventional."

"Though there is nothing that suits you so well. The conventional is only what the united good taste of mankind has found to be the most becoming."

"Not to all styles, perhaps."

"No; I suppose we may except the idiotic and deformed. But," she added, with a yawn, "it is really too late to discuss the subject. If you can do without your beauty sleep, I can't."

"One can see that you've always had it."

"Thanks awfully, and the same to you. *Et maintenant file!*"

Mrs. Faneuil pointed to the door. Petrina laughed in spite of her vague feeling of discontent.

"Oh, if you want to be vulgar—"

"I shall be anything that gives me the freedom of my own room. Besides, vulgarity in French is never without some distinction."

"Like the women one sees on the French stage—ill-bred, but immensely *chic*."

"If you like, my child, *mais file quand même*."

"I can say the same thing in French much more shockingly than you. I heard the Duc de Ruynes berating his servant one day. He was wonderfully histrionic and direct. He said, *fiche le camp, sacré*—"

"For mercy's sake, Petrina, say it to yourself, whatever it is—and go."

"If you mean that for a hint—"

"I mean it for something a great deal stronger. I am sleeping on my feet, and if—"

But Petrina laughed again, and was gone.

CHAPTER XI

A FEW days later Petrina announced to Vassall that she had fixed another date for her wedding-day.

"The Thursday after Easter," she said.

So many difficulties were solved by this decision that Vassall thought it prudent not to ask her reasons for the change.

"As you think best, of course," he assented. "My only regret is that it should be nearly a week later."

"All things considered, it is the day that suits me," Petrina said, untruthfully. She was trying hard to persuade herself that the decision was not forced upon her. "I naturally want to take everything into consideration, so as to offend no one's prejudices."

"That is so like you, dear."

"On the contrary, Harry, it is not at all like me. I do it only because I think that under the circumstances it is wisest. But it will be no precedent. After our marriage I shall expect to be free to follow my own—"

"Of course, of course, dearest," said Vassall, hastily. "Some days ago, if you remember," he went on, "you told me you had other things to say in this connection."

"Yes; but I have already talked them over with mamma, and I think I need not trouble you with them. What church would you like to be married in?"

So Petrina yielded all the points on which she had intended to be firm. She made her plans for a wedding that would be just like any other girl's. This was the end of a cherished sentiment; but she was begin-

ning to learn that the taste of life could be unpleasant. She was too reasonable not to see that her ideas were impracticable; but she was not reasonable enough to understand that Vassall was not to blame therefor. She had concealed from him the views on the marriage service she had expressed to Mrs. Faneuil; and yet she had a feeling that it was his fault if those views could not be carried out. She loved him; of that she had no doubt; but there was no altruism in her love—none of that impulse towards self-surrender which makes passion noble. Altruism is a Christian quality; and Petrina was a pagan. She had been trained not to yield, but to exact; not to minister to others' happiness, but to have others minister to hers. She was not selfish; she was only unconscious that there was any other way to live. Self-denial was a word of which she did not know the meaning. Self-discipline was not in the language she spoke. Her attitude towards marriage was that which she assumed towards the world; it was not to give, but to get; not to enter into a husband's life, but to absorb a husband's in her own. Her Puritan tendency towards self-torture was counteracted by her pagan instinct for self-love. She neither analyzed nor judged herself. She only took it superbly for granted that there was nothing in heaven above, in the earth beneath, or in the soul of man, which Petrina Faneuil had not the right to ask in return for her wealth and her name and the honor of her hand. This was not precisely pride; it was only the right of her personality and birth—a right which there was none to question.

That she should be checked in details was, therefore, something she could not explain. That Vassall should love her and at the same time be of another mind than hers was a fact which caused her a painful

astonishment. It was a sort of love which she could not understand; which she could only brood over, question, and—return.

It was not that he opposed her much. As the winter went by he seemed to yield in everything. There had even been an important matter in which she had set his wishes aside. This pleased her, not from the vulgar vanity of having scored a point, but from the satisfaction of seeing life flow into its smooth and natural course.

They had begun talking of their wedding-tour.

"Where would you like to go?" Petrina asked, and Vassall told her. He had arranged a beautiful journey, quite to the taste of the student of civic and philanthropic affairs. They were to begin at Elmira, where they should see prison reform carried out on practical lines. They would then go on to Chicago, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and the other important cities of the Middle West, where municipal problems would be presented for their study from every point of view. The journey would be interesting and instructive.

Petrina did not say on this subject all that was in her mind; but she said enough. Vassall had the tact to see that it must be a pleasure postponed, and quietly accepted her decision to spend the season in London, the summer at some of the fashionable baths, and the autumn in making visits at English country-houses. The winter would see them back in Boston. He made some objection on the ground of the long absence from his work, but Petrina's insistence overpowered him.

"You will have no need to think of that," she said, majestically; and he, in the weakness and confusion of seeing his plans brushed aside, could protest no more.

Nevertheless, Petrina was not wholly satisfied. The

knowledge that there were radical differences between them gave a sense of incompleteness to their love. There were distances and reserves of which he was more tolerant than she. The fact that they were not wholly agreed was one which she resented. As Good Friday and her mother's wedding day came round she found herself dwelling much upon the subject.

"Why could I not have been married to-day?" she mused. "What is this power which prevents me? I owe it no allegiance and I scorn its creed, and yet it has crippled my freedom to do the thing on which my heart was set."

She sat in the large window-place of the library, and looked out upon the Charles. The river was broad and blue, and dancing under the strong spring sunlight; far away, Corey Hill was showing tints of green. The morning paper had fallen from her lap to the floor. A small paragraph therein had set her brooding. It was only the announcement of the day's services in Vassall's parish church.

"He will be there," she thought, "when he might be here. It is for this that our marriage has been postponed. There is a life into which he goes, leaving me outside. What is it?"

She looked listlessly away over the sparkling river. She heard Mrs. Faneuil enter, but did not speak nor turn.

"What is behind that mask?" the stepmother asked herself again. "Dick Lechmere would say that her face is in one of its Egyptian moods. It baffles even me."

"Would you mind having lunch early, mamma?" was all Petrina said.

"Certainly not; but why?" As Mrs. Faneuil spoke she sat down to her desk and began to sort her papers.

"I am going to church."

"To—?"

"Yes. It's Good Friday."

"Oh, is it? I thought we had Good Friday some weeks ago. No, no; that must have been Ash Wednesday. I never *can* remember these Episcopal days from one another. Of course, it's Good Friday though, because you wanted to be married to-day. Well, I *should* go, if I were you. There won't be many there, because Good Friday is only coming into fashion at the Newbury Street Church. There are so few High Church Unitarians in Boston! Yes, Petrina dear, if it is Good Friday I *should* go to church. Some one is sure to see you and give me the credit for it. And just before your wedding, too! It would look rather *feeling*."

So Petrina went, not to Newbury Street, but to the old church where, she felt sure, Vassall and his mother would be.

She entered late and seated herself in a corner near the door. She was afraid of seeming conspicuous and out of place, but there were so many coming and going that no one noticed her. Through a rift in the congregation she saw Vassall farther up the church, and on the other side. His profile was towards her, and he was listening with attention. Involuntarily Petrina turned from him to hear what was being said.

"And when the sixth hour was come there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?* which is to say, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

As the words rolled down to her she was conscious of a curious thrill; it was not of sympathy; it was not of repugnance; it was rather the shock of being in the

presence of dread ideas to which she was an alien. She felt as though suddenly called upon to breathe the air of a planet in which she had no power to respire.

"In these words," the speaker said, "we approach the mystery of all mysteries in the work of our redemption. In following our Lord's experience we now come to that moment where human vision can go no farther, and even the angels veil their faces with their wings. We have gone with Him from Gethsemane to the judgment seat, and from the judgment seat to Calvary. We have seen Him lifted on the Cross; we have heard Him loose Himself from all His earthly ties. Mother, friend, and follower have accompanied Him thus far. Now we must all stand back, while He goes on alone. His physical pain has not been beyond our understanding. Much of His mental suffering, too, we have been able to comprehend. Now He goes forward to where no effort of mind, sympathy, or imagination will enable us to take our places by His side. He is in the region of extreme spiritual anguish. Where it is and what it is none of us can say. His soul is travelling into it, while human eyes can see only His body dying on the Cross. He is silent. The world is dark. Nature herself, that great, stony-hearted mother, so pitiless of human sorrow, has covered her face before this awful act: the act in which the Son of Man—the son of all men—the son and heir and type and representative of all this sinful race—goes down into that gulf, that dark, that void, where God is not. *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?* My God, thou hast forsaken me! My God, Thou art not here! I am Man! I am Man! and yet I am out of Thy presence! *Eloi! Eloi!* This is the last mystery of pain. This is the goal in which unforgiven sin must surely end—to be out of Thy presence! to be where there is no God! O men and women!



A Vitagraph Production. ***Let Not Man Put Asunder.***

THE MEETING BETWEEN DICK LECHMERE (LOU TELLEGEN) AND FELICIA DE PRONEY (HELENA D'ALGY.)

is it any wonder that there was darkness over all the land? Is it any wonder that Jesus Christ cried out with a loud and lamentable voice? A man's soul had tasted that which no other man's soul has ever been called upon to know—the bitterness of being, for the briefest instant of an instant, away from the presence of God."

Petrina listened, fascinated and yet repelled. She did not try to understand; she was conscious only that she shrank from this idea of spiritual suffering. All that was pagan in her protested against the speaker's use of the word Sin. She looked across at Vassall's calm, attentive face, and wondered.

"How can he believe it?" she asked. "How can these passwords have meaning for a man like him? Does he follow with his reason? or is it only some bewitchment of the will?"

Presently they began to sing. Petrina found the place and stood up with the rest.

"Oh, come and mourn with me awhile,
And tarry here the cross beside;
Oh, come, together let us mourn;
Jesus, our Lord, is crucified."

The air was low and plaintive. There was in it something like a spiritual sob. The people around her sang with a sober earnestness which seemed like a far-off echo of the weeping heard on Calvary. Petrina looked about her with astonishment. Near her was a banker, a neighbor of her own in Beacon Street, the embodiment of middle-aged propriety. What was in his air to-day which seemed to lift him above his spotless white spring waistcoat and his neatly folded tie? Petrina did not know. Not far away a young architect had

just come in. She had once or twice sat beside him at dinner, and thought him a pleasant lad. What was there about him now, serious, elevated, indicative of the man who could do something better than pass the salted almonds or make jests at table? Petrina did not know. The wailing air went on, and she cast her eyes again upon the words:

"O Love of God! O sin of man!
In this dread act your strength is tried;
And victory remains with love;
For, Thou, O Love, art crucified."

The *Amen* came like a long-drawn sigh. The multitude knelt down for silent prayer. Petrina could see Vassall kneeling, his face grave, his hands clasped, his attitude devoutly simple. She had seen him thus before, and the act had touched her. That was when he was still not hers. But now that he had become her own, she could no longer be so dispassionate. She, too, knelt down, but not to pray. Her cheeks were hot, and she wanted to hide them in her hands.

"All this comes in between him and me," she thought. "He shuts me out. He doesn't even try to win me to it. He loves it more than me."

As she knelt she was, for the first time, almost conscious of her inborn hostility to this faith of mysteries and moral duties—of human sin and suffering God. The atmosphere of silent prayer became electric. A woman in black was quietly crying beside her; and Petrina herself choked back a sob, as she rose, drew down her veil, and went away.

But after the excitement of the day she was more than usually brilliant when Vassall came that night. Her eyes were glowing and her cheeks full of color. Her

black evening gown, of some soft clinging stuff, heightened the sparkle of her glance and the radiancy of her complexion.

"The Egyptian has gone," Mrs. Faneuil had said to herself at dinner. "It is the turn of the Parisian."

Vassall had not dined with them. He had been working late at his office, preparatory to his long absence. He had looked in only on his way to Cambridge, apologizing for his morning dress.

Petrina had reacted from her depression earlier in the day. She received him with smiles, she amused him, she made much of him. The very sense on her part that there had been a shadow between them gave a deeper thrill to her happiness in having him there beside her, subject to no spell but hers. Vassall responded with that air of quiet, unexaggerated passion which became him well, and suggested rich reserves. It was one of those moments, special even between those who love each other, when the tie seems tighter, the sympathy fuller, and the union of hearts more complete. Vassall stayed late. When he rose to go, Petrina rose too, and stood confronting him.

"You are looking superb to-night," he said, with a proud smile.

"Am I?" she laughed. "I feel superb."

"So you ought. But why so specially to-night?"

"I don't know. Reaction, perhaps, or perhaps revolt."

"Not against me, I hope."

"I went to your church to-day."

"Really? I didn't see you."

"I didn't want you to see me. I sat in a corner, and wore a veil."

"I hope you—understood."

"Oh, Harry," she cried, with a gesture of the hands.

"what do they mean by sin? What is it? Why do they talk so much about it?"

"Sin, dear—?" Vassall began, in some perplexity.

"Yes, sin. What is it? Who commits it? Who believes in it? Do you?"

"But surely, every one believes that it exists."

"No, not every one, not every one. I do not believe in it. I do not commit it. That is where your religion to-day seemed to me so morbid."

"But sin, dearest, is a great fact."

"You mean a great fancy. I can understand that there is such a thing as illegal or even immoral action—a wrong done to some one else, or to the common weal. But sin as a great spiritual offence against a great spiritual Being—sin as a stain upon one's self—no, no, no! There cannot be an act capable of such a consequence. Tell me frankly. Do you think that I am defiled by any such blot as that?"

"But every one is."

"Don't tell me about every one. Tell me what you think of me. Look at me and say whether or not you believe—as all your hymns and prayers to-day asserted—that I am guilty, that I do things—"

"But we are not required to accuse each other. We are only bound to confess our own sins."

"Then you have them, too?"

"Certainly."

"What are they?"

Vassall looked abashed.

"What are they?" Petrina insisted, with a slight tap of her foot and an imperious smile.

"Oh, lots of things," Vassall stammered, smiling too, but like a big, blushing boy.

"I don't believe it."

"Thank you, dear, but unfortunately—"

"Then tell me some of them. Tell me one. I want to see what you call a sin."

"But we can't treat the matter jokingly."

"I am not joking. I want to know what you do which demands such feeling as I heard expressed to-day. You confess—"

"Yes, dear, but not here, and not to you."

"You are a coward, Harry. If you believed what you say you do, you would tell me some one thing of which you are thoroughly ashamed."

"Oh, come, Petrina! That isn't fair."

"If you believed of yourself the evil you confess you wouldn't be here to-night making love to me. You would be in sackcloth and ashes. You would be in La Trappe. You would be one of those monks in Rome who stand the dead up in corridors and decorate the ceilings with whitened bones. Yes, I can admit that they may believe in sin; but not you and I, who take life so easily—"

"Then let us take it easily, dear. These big subjects are too grave for five minutes' talk at this time of night. Kiss me and let me go. Some other time—"

"Yes, it is always some other time when we poor heathen go round with our lamps looking for an honest man. Oh, Harry, Harry, Harry—!"

But her breath caught. She could not go on. It was with something between a laugh and a sob that she let her head fall upon his shoulder, as he folded her in his arms.

Part II

CHAPTER I

ON the day following the arrival of Vassall and his wife at the Carlton House Hotel, Sir Humphrey de Bohun came to call on them. It was in the morning, and they begged him to stay to luncheon.

"It will be our only opportunity to see you," Petrina urged. "We are going to-morrow to Orpington Park. We are to help celebrate Hippolyta's birthday, which comes on Sunday."

"By Jove, so it does!" cried the father. "I had quite forgotten it. Poor little Polly; she will be eighteen. I haven't seen her for six weeks and more. She comes up to town now and then with my mother. Then we all go and have lunch together at the Prince's Restaurant."

"Is she as pretty as ever?" Petrina asked.

"Not in her mother's style."

"She's a de Bohun," said Vassall.

"Rather a Glendower," Sir Humphrey corrected. "She's not unlike that portrait of my mother which Dante Rossetti painted. You may remember it in the small drawing-room at Orpington Park."

"Oh, yes," said Petrina. "The one we always called the Blessed Damozel. I can fancy that Hippolyta would grow to look like that."

"She is deucedly pretty; but it isn't a style that takes in our time."

"If I remember rightly the portrait of which you speak," said Vassall, "it is a style which would take in any time."

"It's beauty," Sir Humphrey admitted, "but not of a type in vogue. It isn't sufficiently lively, nor *chic*—"

"Nor *canaille*," added Petrina.

"Oh, that's going further than I meant," protested Sir Humphrey. "I don't want Hippolyta to be *canaille*, but I should like to see her a little more—"

"Like Hetty Vienne," Petrina interrupted again.

"Who on earth is Hetty Vienne?" asked Vassall.

"Humphrey knows."

Petrina laughed. The baronet reddened.

"Oh, come. That's hardly fair. You seem to keep marvellously well posted over in America."

"Well, we shall say no more about it, at any rate," said Petrina, pleasantly. "It's not a nice subject—"

"Then why do you bring it up?" said Vassall.

"To see you and Humphrey turn red."

"I? My dear Petrina—"

"Yes, you, Harry dear. You color at the name of Hetty Vienne as if you really knew—"

"As much as you."

"As much as I—which you don't. Does he, Humphrey?"

"Upon my word—"

"There, there, Humphrey; we'll drop it. You men always want to talk about improper things."

"I think I'll just slip out and buy something for Hippolyta," said Sir Humphrey, eager to change the subject. "I can be back in time for lunch if you give me a few minutes' grace."

"Don't you think," Vassall asked, "that I had better go with him, and get something for us to give her?"

"Go to Duvelleroy's, in Regent Street," said Petrina, "and ask for the white lace fan which Mrs. Vassall ordered to be put aside for her. You will then have the privilege of paying ten guineas for it, and bring-

ing it home. Hippolyta will use it after she is presented."

The two men set out upon their errand.

"Shall we take a hansom?" Sir Humphrey asked, as they left the hotel.

"No; let's walk," Vassall replied.

For a few minutes they went on together in silence.

As they turned into Waterloo Place Vassall glanced at his brother-in-law, who was evidently somewhat flustered.

"His face is a little coarser than it used to be," Vassall thought. "And being stouter makes him look shorter."

Sir Humphrey was, however, not precisely short; he was only thick-set and stocky—the type of well-nourished, full-blooded Englishmen, for whom sport, fresh air, and Carlsbad are the necessary antidotes to ease, prosperity, and good living. His ancestors had been knights under the Normans; crusaders under the Plantagenets; statesmen under the Tudors; cavaliers under the Stuarts; and respectable, well-to-do members of Parliament under the House of Hanover. Their names and their merits were so many that their modern representative had ceased to take account of them. Dick Lechmere had said of Sir Humphrey that he had so much family pride that he could afford to cast it to the winds. That gave him the air of having none. He was affable, with the good-nature of one whose wants are material and well supplied. He was obliging, with the easy generosity of him who has no motive for husbanding his resources or his time. He was liked, with the negative popularity of the man who has no conversation, but is always ready to listen and to laugh. With nothing to seek and much to bestow, he passed among men for one who was fulfilling fairly well the purposes of an inscrutable Creator.

"Would it be a liberty," said Vassall, as they went on, "to ask who is Hetty Vienne?"

De Bohun said nothing, but flashed on his brother-in-law one of his famous smiles.

"Humphrey's smile would conquer an army with banners," Petrina had often said.

"It is more eloquent than the gift of tongues," Mrs. Tyrell had remarked last year to Gentian.

"It is the expression of a noble nature," that young lady had replied.

"It is De Bohun's whole stock-in-trade," Lechmere used to say. "With him it takes the place of tact and talent and the whole compass of *savoir faire.*"

"It makes me young again," Mrs. Faneuil laughed, when people spoke of it. "Sir Humphrey has but to smile on me, and I am his. If he only wanted to he could charm me as a serpent does a bird."

"Oh, yes! Humphrey's smile!" Lady de Bohun had cried impatiently to Major Bertie, the other day. "'He smiles valiantly,' as somebody says in Shakespeare. But if you only knew that smile as well as I do! To live with it is like living in perpetual sunshine, with no winter and no night. It is like drinking nothing but *eau sucrée.* It is like being driven mad by tickling. It is like being smothered to death by the scent of violets. Oh, don't talk to me about Humphrey's smile! I've sat in it till it scorched me, till my eyes ached, till its very blandness became a torture."

But Sir Humphrey was the least self-conscious of men. His smile was only the muscular curving of a short upper lip, over handsome teeth, and under a carefully curled mustache. That it rippled away into little dimples, which many a girl had envied, and then broke out like light in his eyes, was nothing but accident.

It was to the real Sir Humphrey only what the mask is to the actor.

"De Bohun smiles because he has nothing to say," Major Bertie had replied to Lady de Bohun.

And it was because he had nothing to say that Sir Humphrey now smiled on Vassall; while Vassall saw only that boyish embarrassment and that sympathetic confession of weakness which are sure of forgiveness beforehand.

They had reached Piccadilly Circus, and in order to cross the stream of traffic were obliged to take separate ways.

"After all, he is a good sort," Vassall thought, as he threaded his way among the vehicles. "Even in his escapades one can't help liking him."

"I think," said Sir Humphrey, as they came together again and began to go up Regent Street—"I think, old chap, that as Petrina is evidently on Emmy's side, you ought to be on mine."

"I don't know what you mean, Humphrey. Petrina doesn't take her side any more than yours."

"Yes, she does. Emmy keeps her posted in all that's going on."

"Possibly; but if Emmy had nothing to tell, Petrina would have nothing to learn."

"That's gently put, and I accept the hinted reprimand. If you spoke as severely as you feel, no doubt your language would be stronger."

"I'm not sure about that. I'm not conscious of feeling severely towards any one. Naturally I am a good deal disappointed that you and Emmy couldn't continue to hit it off together after nearly twenty years of married life."

"Bless your soul, Harry, I could go on hitting it off, as you call it, from now till doomsday. I could keep

a golden wedding, if Emmy would. I was perfectly contented."

"Yes; but did you make her contented?"

"No, I didn't, and I couldn't, for I never knew what she wanted, and I don't know it now."

"But I suppose Emmy has some ground of complaint against you?"

"A hundred! A thousand! There are new ones every day. The chief one is that I bore her."

"But this young lady? This Hetty—?"

"Oh, that's Emmy's game; but I don't know how she's going to play it. I wish you'd find out for me."

"I don't understand."

"I mean that Hetty Vienne is only Emmy's excuse. She's had the same occasion for ten years and more. She was perfectly aware of it, and she didn't care. Just now it suits her purpose to take notice, and she does. Why now more than at any other time, I don't know. Why it should be Hetty Vienne more than Lucy Fitzalan or Maria—"

"Don't you think that you do Emmy injustice in supposing that she knew all that?"

"Not a bit, dear boy. She knew, and she didn't care. She doesn't care now. But what I want to make out is, what's her game? What's it all to lead up to?"

"And you want me to—?"

"To mediate between us. Tell her I'm ready to do anything she likes."

"If she wants to be reconciled?"

"Then I shall be only too delighted. If, on the other hand, she wants a divorce, she shall have it, and have it handsome. But I want to have the matter settled. I want to be free or bound—one or the other."

"And which would you prefer?"

"I have no preference. She shall have what she

chooses. I can live with Emmy as long as she can live with me. On the other hand, I can live without her."

"And the children?"

"I miss them sometimes, poor little souls! I was always fond of them. I am ready to take them, or divide them, or to let her have them all. Emmy shall decide that, too."

"But haven't you any sense of responsibility, man? or of duty? or of conscience? or of mere animal affection?"

Sir Humphrey found these questions embarrassing, and so took refuge in silence and a smile.

"Here we are at Duvelleroy's," he said, a minute later. "Let's go in."

CHAPTER II

"ARE you worried, Harry?" Petrina asked in the evening of that day.

"Rather," he replied, absently.

"What about?"

"Only about Emmy and de Bohun."

"But they seem fairly content with the situation."

"Humphrey isn't."

"Emmy is. What does Humphrey want?"

"He wants something better or something worse. And the tragedy of it is that he is indifferent as to which of the two he gets."

"You mean that he would like—?"

"Either a reconciliation or a divorce."

"I should think that the divorce would be the better."

"Oh, Petrina!"

The matter-of-fact tone in which she spoke gave him another stab.

"How narrow you are!" she laughed.

They were at dinner in the restaurant of the Carlton House Hotel. Vassall had wanted to dine quietly in their own apartment; but Petrina preferred to comé down and see the people. It was also part of her intention to be seen; so she dressed herself in a way to insure respectful attention—in spangled black, with a simple but very costly necklace.

"How pretty this is!" she said, when Vassall had ordered the dinner. "These tints of cream and gold and rose would make the most of any one's complexion;

and only the insolence of great beauty could be other than glad of this delicately shaded light. Yes, Pommery sec for me."

"But don't you find dining in such a crowd rather mixed and public?"

"That's only your Old Cambridge instinct for burial alive. You mustn't be so frigidly unobtrusive."

"I don't like to see so many people."

"But they are amusing and picturesque."

"Aren't we sufficient to ourselves?"

"Good gracious, no! If we had been we should have stayed at home. No two persons are sufficient to themselves—not any more than two musical notes are sufficient to make a melody. Don't be so wrapped up in yourself, Harry dear. A great restaurant of this sort is like a social kaleidoscope. You see the most wonderful combinations— Oh, how do you do, Lady Yorkshire? and Lord Yorkshire? and Mr. Amos? How delightful this is! Let me introduce my husband—Mr. Vassall."

Vassall had risen. Petrina remained seated.

"I know your sister, Lady de Bohun, very well," said the tall, graceful, languid young woman who had stopped to greet Petrina. "She isn't in town this year, I think."

"She hasn't a house," Vassall explained. "She goes to Claridge's."

"I haven't seen her about. Do bring Mrs. Vassall to tea in Bruton Street some Thursday. So glad to see you in England again."

So with a nod Lady Yorkshire, with her two men, passed on.

"That's what Emmy calls 'The Triangle,'" Petrina said, when they were out of ear-shot. "The three are never apart. Amos is an American—an American

Jew, really — and ridiculously rich. Naturally, he is *le plus heureux des trois.* The Yorkshires always occupy his hotel in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. I think it's a little too *affiché* for good taste."

"What do you mean by 'The Triangle'?— Oh, I see."

"You goose! You're positively coloring."

"There's some one nodding to you at that table by the pillar; a plain woman, with red hair."

"Oh, that's Jeanne Vignon, of the Comédie," Petrina explained, as she nodded and smiled in return. "I didn't know she was in England. She's so immensely clever that one forgets her looks. We met her last year in Cairo."

A party of six had come in and were seating themselves at the next table. A pretty little woman in pink and white and diamonds was appointing the guests to their places.

"Comtesse, will you sit there on the Prince's right? and you there, Lady Jane? Mr. Green, will you sit next the Comtesse? and you, Monsieur de Prie—"

Petrina turned at the sound of the voice.

"Why, do tell!" cried the little lady, leaving her table and coming forward with both hands outstretched.

"And I want to know!" Petrina responded, rising and laughing.

"Where have you come from, and what are you doing here, dining all alone with a man?"

"I'm married to him," Petrina explained. "Harry, let me present you to Princess Hans of Markenstein."

"Oh, yes—Mr. Vassall—Lady de Bohun's brother," said the Princess, offering her hand. "You see I know all about him. Hans," she added, as the Prince came forward, "this is my old friend, Petrina Faneuil, now Mrs. Vassall; and this is Mr. Vassall."

The Prince, who was tall and soldierly, bowed with stiff cordiality, while Petrina and the Princess chattered with clipped sentences and hurried questions and replies.

"She was Sophy Gregorson, of Portland," Petrina said in a low voice to Vassall, when the parties had separated and settled down. "When I was at school with her we used to amuse ourselves with the quaint New England country phrases. Every time I see her she has still one to throw at me. She married this Prince Hans, not realizing that she wasn't *standgemässig* among the mediatized houses. When she went to Germany, of course, she was only a morganatic wife. But Sophy's spirit couldn't bend to that. Consequently she makes her husband live in England, where morganatic marriages don't exist and her rank is recognized. She had a terrible battle to fight in Germany. The Emperor wanted to make her some sort of countess, but she wouldn't accept anything short of her husband's name."

"And quite rightly, too," Vassall began; but before he could continue he saw another acquaintance coming. "Who is this stout lady in red, with the wonderful extent of bare shoulders?"

"It's the Duchess of Ambleside," Petrina managed to say, hurriedly, "and don't forget that you know her."

"I saw you, dear, from the other side of the room," said the Duchess, in a gurgling voice, as both the Vassalls rose. "I couldn't resist the desire to come and shake hands with you. I hear you're married. So nice! I remember meeting you, Mr. Vassall, at dear Lady de Bohun's."

"You are very kind, Duchess, I am sure," said Vassall.

"Oh, I never forget so interesting a face as yours. Where are you staying, Miss Faneuil?"

"Here, at this hotel."

"Charming, they say, but so expensive. Come down," she added, turning to Vassall—"come down and spend Sunday with us at Groombridge. Oh, yes, fetch her, too," she went on, seeing that Vassall looked hesitatingly at Petrina. "I'll ask Sir George Wallingford to meet her. I should love to have you. I think your face is so interesting."

"We should be delighted to go," Petrina broke in with a laugh, "only that we are due for Sunday at Orpington Park."

"Then come to Mrs. Poynter's party on Wednesday," the Duchess gurgled on. "I'll send you a card. Dear little woman. Husband has mines or something in South Africa. They've taken our house in Buckingham Gate, and I give the parties. I'm giving a dinner for her here to-night—or else she's giving it for me. Whichever it is, she pays. That table over there with all the orchids. That's her—the pretty woman in pink, who looks as if she painted. Do come to her party, Miss Faneuil. I shall be delighted to see you."

"We should be glad to go if we are in town."

"That's right. I must go now. Don't trouble yourself, Mr. Vassall. So glad to have met you again. You've such an interesting face."

"Isn't she an old dear?" said Petrina, as the Duchess moved away.

"Isn't she an old humbug?" Vassall responded. "But, good Heavens! she's coming back again."

This was true. The Duchess had returned.

"Don't get up," she gurgled again. "I've only come back to say that over at our table we've got Mrs. Tredelly the actress and Hartley Payne the painter. He ought to be Mr. Tredelly, you know, only unfortunately there's one already. Shameful, isn't it? And

yet it's so instructive to watch people in equivocal situations. That's why I made Mrs. Poynter ask them. Just turn a little, Miss Faneuil, and you'll see her—in black, with the red flowers. That's him with the lovely hair—just like a nice French coiffeur. Well, good-bye again. Don't forget Wednesday at Buckingham Gate. So glad you're married. I shouldn't have forgotten your face, Mr. Vassall, if we hadn't met for ten years; it's so interesting."

Her Grace was gone again.

"She's so original!" said Petrina.

"Yes; if it's original to be outrageous. Why did she keep saying that I had such an interesting face?"

"That only means that she is willing to take you up."

"Take me—what?"

"Up; show you attentions; have you go about with her."

"About? Where?"

"In the park; to parties; to the opera; wherever people are seen."

"And you?"

"Oh, I should have Sir George Wallingford. She has arranged for that."

"Well! upon my—!"

"I wish she would. She would modernize you."

"Do you mean to say that I need that?"

"Yes, I do. You're as out-of-date as a Pilgrim Father."

"Then I'm in good company."

"It is never good company to be where you don't belong."

"Do you mean that I belong to—to all this?"

"Naturally. I do."

"We belong to this company of people who parade their infamy?"

"That's rather strong, Harry."

"I refer only to what you have just said."

"I didn't really *say*. I only allowed you to infer what I meant. You might have seen that in the form I gave my sentences."

"I'm not accustomed to observe so closely."

"That's where you're not modern. Nowadays good talk is never periodic. The periodic is positive, and the positive is often slanderous. We talk in broken sentences. We use the noun but not the verb, or we use the verb and allow some one else mentally to supply the nominative. It is safe, skilful, and well-bred."

"Like the minister's wife, who had so much grammar that she could tell a lie without sin."

"It's part of good conversation, too, to interrupt when you have understood enough. Don't oblige the person with whom you are talking to go further than he ought. If there is a missing word in the sentence, it will always become the most emphatic, and will never be difficult to find. Where there is discretion, there need never be any open utterance of scandal."

"I don't like to hear you talk as you are doing now, dear."

"I only speak my mind."

"Then we must differ greatly from each other."

"But we shouldn't if you would agree with me."

"I can't, as long as you include yourself among such people as the Yorkshires, with their effrontery, and the Duchess of Ambleside, with her public recognition of an immoral—"

"Oh, recognition is scarcely the word."

"But she knows of it; she speaks of it."

"There are many things that we know well enough to assert, but not well enough to act upon. Besides, she finds it instructive to study people in equivocal

situations. That is probably for the purpose of comparing notes. If fame does not belie her, she has seen such situations from a nearer point of—"

"What a lot of such things you know, Petrina!" Vassall exclaimed.

"And don't you?" she asked.

"Possibly; but I am a man."

"And does that fact give you a monopoly of knowledge?"

"A man cannot but know things of which his wife had better be ignorant. I am old-fashioned enough to believe that."

"So I should suppose; but I am not."

Petrina laughed lightly, and slowly waved her large, black, spangled fan. A note had been struck in the conversation which exhilarated her. There was in her a strain of daring that delighted to skate out on the thin ice of discussion. The danger sign-post only lured her on. She was proud, too, of being able to look at the uglier side of life with toleration. She flattered herself on having no Hebraic horror at the sight of what commonplace people call Wrong. Life to her was a spectacle in which one could always detect the vice of the virtuous and the virtue of the vicious. That she found amusing. She would have shrunk from the squalor of the drunkard in the slums; but here in this great room, with its toned light, its shades of cream and rose and gold, its flash of jewels, its scent of flowers, its fumes of wine, its subdued laughter, its hum of talk, its distant music, its perfect correctness of all outward seeming—here vice was a stimulating contrast; it excited the mind; it stirred the curiosity; it took away from a well-bred life something of its exquisite tameness.

As Petrina looked about her, it was as if she was

gazing down long aisles of life which radiated from herself as a centre. She liked to watch the languid young Countess of Yorkshire, greeted by half the people who entered, and wonder whether or not she had any sense of shame. She liked to look over at Hartley Payne, who had a wife and children in North London, and guess whether or not he had any feeling of remorse. She liked to contemplate the bravado of Sophy Gregorson and the dash with which she bore herself as a Grand Ducal Highness—and yet to penetrate to the sense of outrage and humiliation which Petrina knew to lie within.

"The heart that knoweth its own bitterness," she mused, "doth well in carrying it to London. Here alone can it be at once both private and public, exposed to open view and yet borne with nonchalance."

Vassall, on the other hand, grew moody. He was conscious of something odious in the very atmosphere. This public exhibition of luxury and appetite was repugnant to his New England instinct for seclusion. That people who had homes of their own should choose to come with their guests and herd with the multitude seemed to him a refined vulgarity. That they should make such display of their purses and persons shocked that Puritan spirit—a mixture of pride and shyness, of humility and disdain—which was to him like the breath on his lips. The very lights and flowers and music he found distasteful; their beauty seemed meretricious, like that of the gems on many of the bosoms, and the color on many of the cheeks, around him.

But more displeasing than any lavishness of outward show was the moral negation he divined everywhere—the setting at naught of those principles and duties which, to his thinking, alone gave one a respect for life. That women like Mrs. Tredelly and the Coun-

tess of Yorkshire should be sitting there, feasted and flattered and looked at with envious eyes—that they should not be pilloried on a platform with the Scarlet Letter A flaming on their breasts, was, he felt, a scandal. It was characteristic of him that, while for such men as Payne and Amos and Lord Yorkshire he had only a lenient scorn, for the women he had nothing but the whip-cord of severity. There were weak men and there were vile men; one knew it, and yet one was obliged to give them some sort of foothold in human society; but for the weak woman or the vile woman there could be nothing but the ducking-stool or Saint-Lazare. Vassall had neither sympathy for Hester Prynne nor pity for Manon Lescaut. He was not without sin; and yet he would have remained behind when the Scribes and Pharisees went out one by one, in the eighth chapter of St. John. He would have spared, with contemptuous mercy, Payne and Amos and Zimri the son of Salu; while he would have thrust through with a javelin Mrs. Tredelly and Lady Yorkshire and Cozbi the daughter of Zur.

So, with a sense of disapproval, he ate his dinner and sipped his wine. With a party of other men he could have enjoyed the spectacle for once, as an instance of modern luxury and fashion. But with Petrina there he was ill at ease. It pained him to see her so much at home among these people. It jarred upon him to hear her speak with so much knowledge of their characters and affairs.

"Are you worried, Harry?" she asked, when he had been some time silent.

It was then that they spoke of Sir Humphrey and Lady de Bohun; and again a discordant note came into the talk.

"How narrow you are!" Petrina laughed lightly as

she tasted her ice. "I dislike divorces as much as you do," she went on, "but I am obliged to think that a time may come when husband and wife ought to set each other free."

Vassall would not discuss the topic, and so the conversation flagged again.

"Suppose we have our coffee in the hall?" he suggested.

"Yes; this room is rather hot."

In going out Vassall remarked with pride the glances of admiration which followed Petrina as she passed. No Englishwoman in the room had more dignity, no Frenchwoman more grace, no American more charm. She nodded again to Lady Yorkshire, to Princess Hans, and to Jeanne Vignon. The men half rose and bowed as she went on.

"Don't forget Wednesday," said the Duchess as they passed her table, "even if I don't send you a card."

They were among the first to come out into the great, cool palm-court, which serves, at the Carlton House Hotel, for drawing-room, smoking-room, entrance-hall, and lounge. One of the few tables on the little terrace was still free, and they took it. Even Vassall found it amusing to watch the people come and go—some leaving early for the last acts at the opera—others settling themselves in groups around the little tables under the palms and fern-trees. Petrina was in the best of spirits. She enjoyed the color and light and movement—the ever-shifting contrasts of what she called the living kaleidoscope. She was in one of those radiant moods before which her husband's moroseness never failed to melt. He grew gay again. As he smoked and sipped his chartreuse he laughed with her at the human oddities around them, and echoed her admiration of the pretty robes. They guessed at nationalities;

and among their own compatriots distinguished between those who must have come from Indiana or Illinois and those who were evidently of New York. They agreed that there were no Bostonians but themselves.

"Look, look!" Petrina cried, suddenly. "Who is that girl in white?"

"Where?"

"Not there; over by that fern-tree; she's standing with two men, and a lady in dark green. Now they're sitting down. Don't you see?"

"No; I don't."

"How stupid! She's the most wonderfully beautiful creature! It's the table next the Yorkshires."

"Yes, yes, I see her now. Looks like some nice English clergyman's daughter."

"A little—you mean her air of modesty—"

"And goodness."

"Yes, and something demure and serene and distinguished—"

"You can fancy her cutting flowers in the vicarage garden to decorate the chancel of the church. It's a sort of Royal Academy vicar's daughter, though. That perfect oval of her face—"

"And large blue eyes— Oh, Harry, do look at her! She's really too maidenly. And what a hand! Notice how she holds her cup!"

"I'm trying to do justice to her lovely light hair."

"How prettily it grows!" said Petrina, enthusiastically. "I wish mine would!"

"And yet I seem to know her face," said Vassall, absently, searching in his memory.

"And I, too. I've seen her in some photograph, I am sure. I have in mind the form without the coloring. I never could have forgotten those eyes or that complexion, if I had once seen them—or those pearls. Just

look at the pearls, Harry! One, two, three, four—four rows, and such marvels! Oh, no; she can't be a clergyman's daughter. She must be at least—"

"By George!" Vassall exclaimed, bringing his hand heavily down on the table. "I know her. It's Felicia de Prony, Lechmere's wife."

"Oh!" Petrina breathed softly.

"I knew I had seen her somewhere," Vassall went on. "But it's always been on the stage. I didn't recognize her like this."

"I've always missed her, wherever I've been," said Petrina, gazing intently at the prima donna. "You must certainly take me to hear her."

"If you like. But, good heavens, what a contrast!"

"Between—?"

"Between what she looks like and what she is."

"That is—?"

"That she looks like a saint and is, in reality, the worst of women."

"I should like to know her."

"My dear Petrina—!"

"I should. I shall."

"No, dearest," Vassall began. "I couldn't allow you."

"You couldn't what?" Petrina asked, with a sudden turn of her glance upon him, and a swift but perceptible change of humor.

"I couldn't allow you to meet such a woman."

"When I ask for permission, Harry dear," she said, with a smile—but a smile in which there was a certain nervous irritation—"it will be time enough to refuse it."

"I like to take time by the forelock," he answered, with good temper.

"There is such a thing as the more haste the less speed."

"I know you don't intend to disobey me, dear; so why should we talk like two children?"

A sudden flush rose to Petrina's cheek, but she checked the reply that was trembling on her tongue.

"I am tired," she said, haughtily, rising as she spoke. "I think I will go up-stairs."

But she took the pains to be very gracious to Lady Yorkshire and Mr. Amos as she passed out, and to have a final word with the Duchess of Ambleside, knowing that Vassall was behind her, silent and annoyed.

CHAPTER III

"CAN you imagine anything lovelier than an early summer morning at Orpington Park?" Petrina asked, as she came out before breakfast to join Vassall, who was already walking on the terrace.

The two stood still to look over the soft landscape, at this moment fresh and sparkling with the effect of sunlight upon dew.

The house, of the style of architecture called in England Italian—long, rectangular, and gray—stood on a slight eminence, commanding an extensive view over Kent. The gardens and lawns were terraced until they descended to the park; the park dipped and dimpled and rolled till it merged into pastures; and the pastures stretched into orchards, hop-gardens, and farms. Here and there a red roof, here and there a spire, here and there the semi-conical cowl of a hop-kiln appeared above the trees. The may was in blossom along every hedge and on every hill-top; and the land was flushed and flower-bedecked like a bride.

The terrace on which Vassall and Petrina stood was bordered by a low stone balustrade, over which ivy and honeysuckle clambered from still another terrace below. The long stone line was broken at intervals by huge vases, in which were plants in bloom. Peacocks were strutting on the lawn, and thrushes singing everywhere. It was Sunday morning; and even Nature seemed to know it.

"I say, Uncle Harry," called a boy's voice. "Aren't

you and Aunt Petrina coming in to breakfast? I'm starving, and mother won't be down for hours."

"All right, my son; we'll come," Vassall called in reply.

As they turned they saw in the open French window of the breakfast-room a bright-faced boy of fifteen in an Eton jacket, turned-down linen collar, and long, gray trousers. He was as like Sir Humphrey de Bohun as a sapling is like a tree.

"Poor Tristram!" said Petrina, as they went towards him.

The boy's rosy face broke into a dimpling smile, the very reflection of his father's.

"Mother made a great fuss about getting me home from Bab's to meet you," he complained. "And now I'm left to die of hunger."

"But we are here to come to your rescue."

"That's why I'm glad you've married Uncle Harry," he returned. "I said to Polly, 'Now there will be one more person to take us off our incompetent parents' hands.'"

"Don't talk like that, my young rover," Vassall said.

"But you've only to look at me to see how badly they do their duty, Uncle Harry," the lad persisted. "Every one at Bab's thinks I'm the worst brought-up boy in the school, and me the heir to a baronet of Nova Scotia!"

"How should you have liked me for a mother?" said Petrina, coming up and stopping him with a kiss.

"I don't know about *mother*," he said, as he disengaged himself from her embrace, "but if I had my life to begin over again you would be something nearer than an aunt."

"And where should I have come in?" Vassall asked, with a laugh.

"I should always have allowed you the pleasure of being my uncle."

He led the way into the breakfast-room.

"What an excruciating little man!" said Petrina, in a low voice.

"Humphrey's looks, but Emmy's power of language."

"By the way," said Petrina, before she took her place, "have you put everything beside Hippolyta's plate? Yes," she went on—"Humphrey's letter, his two packets, our fan—yes, they are all there. Thanks, dear."

"And I've invested ten shillings of my hard-earned pocket-money in a leather handkerchief-case," Tristram remarked, as they all sat down. "That's the package tied with the piece of red string. The other's a card from Humphie. Oh, I say, do look at Polly with her hair done up! Isn't she like granny's picture?"

Petrina glanced up from her ministrations with the coffee, and Vassall from his with the cold ham.

The breakfast-room opened into the tapestry-room; the tapestry-room into the smaller drawing-room. The tapestry-room was long. In the great, square doorway at the farther end, and framed between two Corinthian columns from which stretched hangings of soft old greens and blues, stood a tall and slender girl in white, her golden hair coiled like a coronet—blushing and smiling in the self-consciousness of this first acknowledgment of womanhood. High up on the wall of the drawing-room behind her they could see Dante Rossetti's portrait of Lady Constance Glendower, at eighteen—a tall, slight, fair-haired maiden, like a Beatrice or a saint—robed in dark green, cloaked in red-brown, girdled with gold, and holding a white lily in her hand. Even from the distance at which they sat Vassall and

Petrina could see the likeness between the portrait and the girl.

"By George!" exclaimed Vassall, under his breath. "Isn't she pretty?"

"Pretty is not the word," said Petrina. "She's a great beauty. But Humphrey was quite right. It's beauty too great to be *chic*, too pure to be a fashion."

The girl came slowly down the tapestry-room, smiling shyly, as if in protest against her appearance.

"Soft violet eyes like hers," Petrina went on, "will inspire men to noble acts, but never invite them to flirtation."

As Hippolyta came nearer, Petrina rose and went to meet her.

"I want to wish you many happy—the very happiest—returns of the day."

"Thanks, dear Petrina," the girl replied, while they kissed each other.

As Vassall offered his congratulations, Petrina took the fan from the box and opened it.

"We hope you will use this—for our sakes," she said.

Hippolyta flushed again with pleasure.

"Oh, how lovely! I've never had anything so pretty of my own. I use mother's old fans—"

"And just look here," said Tristram, as they all took their places again about the table. "Here's something from me which I hope you'll appreciate, for it has cost me more than ten common shillings' worth of self-denial. And here's something, too, from your poor, erring father."

"Don't say that, Tristram, not even in fun," Hippolyta said, gently, as she opened her father's letter.

"I'm not in fun. We're all liable to error—even I. And how can any one tell what a man all alone in

London may be up to? Since I've been at Bab's I've learned a thing or two."

Vassall and Petrina exchanged glances, but Hippolyta was too deep in her letter to heed her brother's talk. She opened her packages with pretty pleasure. Her father's trinkets filled her with joy, and Tristram's boyish gift brought the shimmer of tears to her soft eyes.

"Thank you so much, dear old Tristie," she said, leaning across the table to pat his hand.

"But you're going to get something much better than that, you know," said the boy. "I don't know what it is, but I expect it's jewelry. I heard mother telling Henshaw that it cost a tremendous lot, and that she had put into it all her winnings for months."

Hippolyta turned scarlet.

"Hush!" she whispered.

"Well, she did," the boy insisted. "And to my certain knowledge she's had very particular luck. One night, about a month ago, she won over fifty pounds from old Bertie. I heard her say so. And another time Dick Lechmere lost to her more than—"

"Do excuse me, good people," cried Lady de Bohun, who rushed into the room, with soft skirts and diaphanous sleeves all blowing with her motion. In one hand she held a white velvet case, while with the other she was trying to adjust the lace knotted at her throat. "I really did hurry—"

"Mother's always in a hurry, and yet never in time," said Tristram, with his mouth full.

"Good-morning, Petrina. Good-morning, Harry. Good-morning, Tristram. Hold your head up and sit straight."

Lady de Bohun passed round the table and pecked a hasty kiss at each one in turn.

"Good-morning, Hippolyta. Let me see how Henshaw has done your hair. Well, you *do* look like your granny. I suppose we shall get used to your hair like that. At present it makes you look as if you were dressed up for private theatricals. Now, don't hold your head so much like a Zenobia in chains. It gives you a proud look—doesn't it, Petrina?—and I'm sure a girl of your age— Oh, by the way, here is your present. Mind you, this is from me, not from your father. I've earned every penny that paid for it."

"You mean you've won it at cards, mother," said the boy.

"It's the same thing, Tristram," said his mother, sharply. "And please don't contradict."

"I wasn't contradicting; I was only explaining."

"Then keep your remarks till they're asked for."

"That would be too long. They won't bear salting down."

"No, don't get up," Lady de Bohun protested, as Petrina offered to yield the head of the table. "I will sit here beside Harry. Give me a cup of coffee, *pour l'amour de Dieu*. My strength is almost spent. The cares of a family are too much for me. I wasn't meant to be left to struggle on alone like this."

"Yet you manage to do pretty well," said Vassall.

"My dear Harry, I begin every day like 'Phèdre'—at the highest pitch of anguish."

"Mother, if I have ever given you half the anxiety that you and father have given me," Tristram began, but Lady de Bohun was paying him no attention. She was looking at Hippolyta, who sat with eyes downcast and burning cheeks, feigning to eat, but really taking nothing. The white velvet case lay unopened beside her. Lady de Bohun rolled her eyes eloquently,

first towards Petrina, then towards Vassall, throwing apart her hands with a little gesture of despair.

"The Blessed Damozel," she murmured, with pinched lips, so that Hippolyta should not hear.

"Aren't you going to look at your present?" she said, aloud. "It is scarcely worth while spending eight hundred pounds, to say nothing of all my excitement, anxiety, and time."

Hippolyta lifted her eyes with an expression of dumb pain, but she took the case and opened it. The color fled from her cheek, and then came hotly back, as she saw what her mother had given her. The simple necklet of pearls—one row—lying on a cushion of pale-blue velvet was as pure as her own face. She gazed long at it, and then once more lifted her eyes, still full of that mute pleading.

"Well?"

"Thanks, mother," the girl managed to stammer, and turned scarlet again.

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is," Lady de Bohun quoted, with a laugh.

"I am not a thankless child, mother," the girl asserted, with fine dignity, holding up her head, while the flaming color died away.

"I didn't say you were, dear; only, at times, our looks belie us."

"You are more than kind to me, mother, but—"

"Then, if you think so, wear the necklet with your new low-cut gown to-night when Major Bertie and Mr. Lechmere come to dinner. That reminds me," she went on, briskly, turning to Vassall: "did I tell you that Dick Lechmere was staying over at Keston Castle with Gerald Bertie?"

Then the brother and sister began to discuss common acquaintances and family affairs. Hippolyta and

Tristram, when they had finished breakfast, slipped quietly from the room. Petrina slowly sipped her coffee, and listened in silence, trying to analyze Emilia de Bohun's charm.

That she had charm, her severest critics never denied. Her beauty was of the fragile, wistful type,which seemed to call on every one to be very tender. In her eyes was that beseeching glance which claimed beforehand the right to be inconsequent and irresponsible. The air of asceticism which was spiritual in her mother, and in her brother stern, gave to Lady de Bohun the expression of one purified seven times in the fire. In conversation with her one felt that she had suffered much, and had had experiences outside the ordinary range. Her tone enlisted one's sympathies. A something pathetic and inefficient in her mien forced forgiveness before one had time to disapprove. Even her smile was distant, wan, and sweet with the memory of unutterable things, like that of Sarah Bernhardt in "La Dame aux Camelias" or "Phèdre."

She had inherited a countenance whose expression was like the light which lingers in the sky long after sunset—the reflection of some ancestral fire gone out. If in her face there were prayers, they had been said by Pepperells and Vassalls now sleeping in Massachusetts church-yards. If in her voice there were tears, they had been shed by those who would weep no more. She mirrored the emotions she had never felt; and all that was left of joys and sorrows and spiritual aspirations which had once thrilled human hearts was in that plaintive echo they had given to this woman's tone and the light of petition they had left burning in her eyes.

But Lady de Bohun made no conscious use of these advantages. Never was there any one who thought less of personal appearance. Never was there any one

with less coquetry. She dressed at hap-hazard; she spoke what she thought; she did what the moment suggested. Nothing ever went quite aright with her. Her dressmaker was always late; her cook was always dishonest; she herself was the prey of unhappy chances. As Tristram had just said of her, she was always in a hurry yet never in time. She was always busy yet never accomplishing anything.

But in contrast with her air of inefficiency was the cleverness of her talk and the unexpected shrewdness of her judgments. Her mind was of the kind which can occupy itself with everything but duty. She did not reflect, but she had illuminations. She allowed servants to regulate her domestic affairs, and any one who chose to take charge of her children; but she read extensively, rapidly, and retentively. There was no order in her reading, and little preference of taste. Herbert Spencer, Wordsworth, and Gabriele d'Annunzio were equally to her liking; and her criticisms were quick and sound. She could judge of pictures as of books, and of men as of pictures. She expressed herself freely and frankly, without self-consciousness, but with a certain vehement sincerity. She attached no importance to saying clever things; and had long forgotten her own epigrams when they were still being passed around as specimens of her wit.

"If Emmy had only married in Boston," Petrina mused, as she sat and listened, "she would have been very different from this. Our New England discipline would have toned her down. Our mental east winds would have chilled her impetuosity. Our social self-repression would have checked her appalling frankness and taken away her audacity. Her name would not have been mentioned half a dozen times in every number of *The World*. She would never have enjoyed the friend-

ship of a prince; but she would have married a member of the Somerset Club, and had a house at Pride's Crossing."

Petrina's judgment was just. Lady de Bohun's natural tendency was to take the tone around her. Had she married in Boston, she would have conformed to Boston standards; but she had married not only into English life, but into a special section of English society. From the first day of her installation at Orpington Park and in Curzon Street she had found herself surrounded by people who formed a kind of social free-masonry. Some were rich, some had titles, some had talents; some had two of these qualifications, and some all three, while a very few had none. In society they constituted an empire within an empire—and the throne, like that of Russia, was neither hereditary nor elective, but occupative. Admission to their ranks was both difficult and easy; people of great importance could sometimes not get in, when the way was often open to the first chance adventurer.

The young American Lady de Bohun entered at once, by a conceded but inexplicable right. Fresh from the reticence of Old Cambridge, what she saw on her first plunge into English life surprised her. She found a society full of paradox and anomaly, at once more orthodox and more loose, more aristocratic and more republican, than that she had left behind. She found herself among people so socially strong, so naturally proud, so individually free, that they had no need to restrain themselves. They could ignore manners, because there was no one whom they wished to please; they could transgress morals, because there was no one whom they were obliged to respect. They did not fear law, for they made it; nor society, for they ruled it; nor the Church, for they were patrons of count-

less livings; nor public opinion, for they held it in scorn. It is easy to elude, or twist, or turn, or mould, or break conventions, when, like the Duchess of Ambleside, one of your brothers is Prime Minister and another an archbishop; while your kinsfolk and acquaintance make up a handsome proportion of the clergy, the army, the navy, the learned professions, the House of Commons, and the House of Lords. It is easy to be capricious, and something more, when you know that the very people who condemn your acts delight in the honor of your friendship. The Duchess of Ambleside found herself in a position to assume towards morality and etiquette the attitude which she took towards grammar—the wrong became right because she did it. Lady Yorkshire could do the same. Many others could do the same. Millionaires like Mrs. Poynter and Mr. Amos supported the privileges of "birth" with money. Actresses like Mrs. Tredelly, painters like Hartley Payne, and singers like Madame de Prony brought the aid of art. There were journalists to give notoriety, and clergymen to add respectability. The combination was powerful but co-operative; interdependent, but presenting a bold front towards the world.

Lady de Bohun's first mistake was in supposing this to be the whole of English life. Before she realized her error it was too late to withdraw. It was not that she had ever wanted to withdraw; but she never quite lost the consciousness that she had wandered very far from the traditional mother's knee.

In her new life she had begun timidly and tentatively —at once a little flattered and a little shocked. It took her at least a few years to adjust her mind to the absence of high standards, to the pursuit of fugitive pleasure, and to the adoration of naked wealth. She did

not at first accept very easily the attentions of men other than her husband; and with regard to cards she was ridiculously Puritan. The difference between American and English materialism she found hard to understand. In her own country she had known men who worked grimly, unflaggingly, and often sordidly, for money, as an end; in England, those with whom she was thrown snatched wildly, openly, and often hysterically, at it, as a means. It surprised her to observe that at a time when Americans were endeavoring to advance by putting ideals before money, the English whom she knew were beginning to retrograde, by putting money before ideals.

In the religious attitude of those around her she was equally perplexed. She had sprung from a people who were strict about morals, but gave large liberty in matters of faith; she found herself among those who were strict about faith, but gave large liberty in matters of morals.

But these and all other questions were solved as she went on and gained experience. She was able in time to take the English point of view better than the American. She adapted herself slowly, but with great success. A moment came when she conceded the point that conversation between men and women had better be free than reticent. After that her popularity mounted rapidly. The little things she whispered to her neighbors at table were repeated later amid roars of laughter in the smoking-room, and dubbed American. Next, she overcame her prejudice with regard to cards. When she did so she played with skill; and her luck became the subject of remark. As years went by the demure little maiden who had grown up in Old Cambridge under Mrs. Vassall's wing disappeared in the quick-witted woman of the world—a favorite at Amble-

side House, and a frequent guest at the parties made up in those days to meet the Prince.

As Petrina listened while the brother and sister talked, she knew that Vassall was wincing inwardly at the plainness of his sister's speech. She understood now why Mrs. Vassall had not visited her daughter for more than seven years.

And yet upon Petrina herself Lady de Bohun had the effect of a temptation—something which shocked and yet attracted her, which appalled her and yet filled her with a certain envy.

CHAPTER IV

STILL gossiping of things and people in Boston and Cambridge, Lady de Bohun, Petrina, and Vassall strolled from the breakfast-room to the terrace, and sat down on a garden seat under a great yew-tree. The bells of Bishop's Orpington Church were pealing from the other side of the park.

Presently Tristram come forth, wearing a high hat and gloves, a cane in his right hand and a huge prayer-book tucked under his left arm.

"Who's coming to church?" he asked, standing at some little distance from the three under the yew-tree.

"Why on earth do you want to go to church on a lovely day like this?" Lady de Bohun cried, languidly.

"To learn how to set a good example to my children, when I get 'em," replied Tristram.

"While you are at it," Lady de Bohun returned, more briskly, "you might see what there is on the subject of honoring your father and mother."

"Oh, I've known that a long time, mamma dear, only you and papa don't give me any chance to show it."

Tristram turned on his heel and walked away.

"Do you know," Lady de Bohun confided, in a lowered voice, "I sometimes wish that boy had been born without a tongue."

"He has such a boyish face that his speeches are uncanny," said Petrina.

"Oh, I assure you," Lady de Bohun cried, in a tone that had tears in it, "he makes me feel quite like Ham-

let's mother. He talks as if he knew things beyond his years. It frightens me. Not, indeed, that there is anything for him to know, but—" Lady de Bohun stopped herself as she saw her daughter, too, come out of the house on her way to church. "There's Hippolyta. She's off, of course. She never misses—and the choir-boys sing so dreadfully out of tune. I simply can't go; it gives me a headache. And I'm sure there's somebody buried under our pew—I have such a smothering feeling every time I sit in it. How do you like Hippolyta's hat? That sort of broad Leghorn is becoming to her, I think."

"She is really too divine," said Petrina.

"That's just it," complained Lady de Bohun. "She's the gentle being quite

"'Too good for human nature's daily food,'

if I may alter the lines. She'll frighten the men away."

"Let's hope so," said Vassall. "There isn't a man in a million good enough for her."

"That's all very fine," sighed Lady de Bohun. "But you won't have to take her out next winter."

"No—worse luck," Vassall assented.

Hippolyta had crossed from the house and was about to descend to the terrace below. She paused for a second, and looked over at the group and smiled. Far down the slopes of the park Tristram's sturdy figure could be seen trudging off towards Bishop's Orpington.

"Don't you want to take me with you, Hippolyta?" Vassall called.

"You know I do."

"Oh, Harry, don't go," pleaded Petrina. "Hippolyta won't mind. It's so lovely here."

"Yes, let him go," Lady de Bohun insisted. "Then

we shall have the house to ourselves, and I do so want to have a long talk with you. I can't talk before Harry; he's so unsympathetic. It's like singing to a person who has no ear for music. Do go, Harry. Wait, Hippolyta. Your uncle is going with you."

So Vassall went.

"How you've tidied him up!" Lady de Bohun remarked, a few minutes later, as her brother, very carefully dressed, walked across the park at Hippolyta's side. "He used to be so indifferent about what he wore."

"I think he is improved," Petrina admitted.

"Immensely. He's so much more human than he used to be. The social side of life interested him so little."

"And not enough yet."

"But you'll bring him to it; I can see that. He is really very good-looking, when you come to study his face. It never struck me before. I feel about him as one does about a familiar bit of family furniture, to which you never paid any attention until some one else admired it."

"He was only your brother, you see."

"I was simply amazed when I heard you were going to marry him."

"Not unpleasantly, I hope."

"Heavens, no. I knew it would be the making of him, and it is. Only don't—"

"Yes?" asked Petrina, as Lady de Bohun hesitated. "Don't what?"

"Don't set going a machine which you can't control. Never forget the moral of *Frankenstein*."

"I suppose you are not speaking out of a bitter experience," Petrina laughed. "Humphrey doesn't seem to me exacting."

"Poor Humphrey!" Lady de Bohun cried, throwing up her hands in perplexity. "What a problem I have to deal with there!"

"Problem?"

"Yes, problem. I must decide whether to keep him as he is or let him go."

"Let him go to what extent?"

"To any extent. I haven't told you yet that I have begun my proceedings for divorce. That's why I wanted Harry to go to church. I wished to tell you. I can see you are horrified."

"Not horrified exactly, Emmy dear; but I can't help wondering—"

"No, of course not; nor I. I am wondering all the time. It is so hard to decide whether to go on with it or not."

"Then you could still withdraw?"

"I am extremely cautious. All that I've done as yet is to consult Sir Charles Freeman. He tells me that I can have a decree *nisi*—I think that's what he called it—whenever I like to press for it."

"Wouldn't Humphrey defend it?"

"He simply couldn't. He would never attempt it. By the way, did I tell you that I had met Hetty Vienne?"

"Oh, Emmy! How could you?"

"I did, my dear. It was most interesting. It was at that big *thé chantant* given for the King's Cross Hospital. Of course they had a lot of actresses to recite and sing and wait at table, and among them, if you please, was Miss Hetty Vienne. Did you ever hear such a name?" Lady de Bohun went on, vehemently. "Why shouldn't she just as well call herself Hetty Bruxelles or Hetty Genève? Of course she made it up. These acting women are born with such ridiculous patronymics. There was Lucy Fitzalan, that Hum-

phrey was so crazy about—but it's no use raking up ancient history of that kind. At any rate, her real name was Matilda Tabb. I think it was the discovery of that genteel fact that really put an end to Humphrey's infatuation. But I was telling you about Hetty Vienne—Hetty Pidge, or Pudge, most likely. Well, when I heard she was actually there, and that people were watching to see if some accident would throw us together, I determined that they shouldn't look in vain. I asked Gerald Bertie to introduce her to me."

"He ought to have refused."

"He did. I had to insist. He gave way only when he saw that if he didn't I should find some one else who would."

"And she? What was she like?"

"Charming—perfectly charming. A pretty girl, fair, blue-eyed—a little made-up—and with the nicest manners. It was difficult to believe—but then it always *is* difficult to believe. Take Agneta Yorkshire, for instance. If you didn't *know*—"

"But what did you talk about?"

"Why, about Humphrey."

"Oh, no, Emmy."

"*Mais si.* She began it, by saying, almost at once, 'I'm so glad to meet you, Lady de Bohun. I think I know your husband.' My dear, it was better than anything on the stage. 'I think I know'!"

"Wasn't it dreadfully embarrassing?"

"Not in the least. I replied, 'I think I have heard him speak of you, Miss Vienne'; and then I made her sit down and have tea with me. It was perfectly lovely. Everybody stared; and they say the Prince was—"

"I can't think that it was right, Emmy."

"Of course it wasn't. But I've never regretted it, especially as Humphrey himself came in and saw it all.

Poor man, if I ever had anything against him, I had my vengeance then. He strolled down the great hall, smiling his wonderful smile quite gratis to every one who came in his way—when all at once, when he was expecting nothing in particular, he saw us two sitting gossiping over our tea. Petrina, I felt myself repaid for having married, just to have had that moment. She didn't see him, and I never let him know that I did. He grew first red, then white, and then turned and fled. It was a sight to see, and was worth more than the price of admission. They say the Prince said—"

"But how did it end? How did you separate?"

"Oh, naturally, I couldn't let her go feeling that I had met her as an equal."

"No? But how?"

"Just by chance; I am always having those chances. Besides, I was looking for an opening. She had just said—why, I'm sure I don't know—that she was an officer's daughter. 'Commissioned?' I asked, quite innocently, and rising as I spoke. She colored a little and said, 'I didn't know there was any other kind.' 'Oh, yes,' I answered, sweetly, 'there are the non-commissioned—corporals, and sergeants, and such-like. Good-bye. So glad to have met you.'"

"And Humphrey has never said—?"

"Never. It is one of his gifts to know when to let well enough alone. I wonder whether I have the same faculty."

"If you have I should think that now was the time to make use of it. I don't see how you are going to improve your position by divorce. In fact, you might easily make it worse."

"Not among the really nice people. They almost like you better for the sensation and the—the scandal,

you know. And about the rest of the world one doesn't care."

"Besides, Humphrey might marry again," Petrina argued.

"Not he. I am positive of the contrary."

"But if he did, how should you feel?"

"Perhaps a twinge or two; perhaps nothing at all."

"Tell me frankly, Emmy," said Petrina, speaking with a deeper earnestness. "Has all the love you used to feel for Humphrey quite died away?"

"Love," said Lady de Bohun, slowly—"love, as I understand it, is like a garment. When it is new we wear it with pleasure. When it has lost its freshness we wear it still—but with less pride. When it is old we twist it and turn it and try to make it serve some useful end. But a day comes round when we are tired to death at the sight of it, and are glad to give it away."

"But there are new garments."

"And there is new love."

"But when a man and woman have once cared for each other—"

"They can become as if they had never cared at all. That is one of the mysteries of passion—which differentiates it from liking or friendship, or any other affection. They may all pass, but they leave some sort of trace behind. Love can go, and leave no trace; and once gone it is as impossible to recover as a perfume scattered by the wind. Humphrey and I could never love again, for the very reason that we *have* loved. Love is a fire which, when once quenched, can never be rekindled. Another fire may burn on the same hearth, but the old will be in ashes."

"And with you—? But I ought not to ask."

"Yes, ask, Petrina. Besides, I know what you mean

to say, and I don't quite see how to reply to you. There *is* some one—"

"Oh! Isn't it rather—rather—soon?"

"A cause can't be *soon*, if there is an effect."

"I wonder if it is Major—?"

"Yes, Major Bertie; you've guessed. Of course you would see it before long."

"What is he like?"

"I think I will let you wait and see. He comes to dinner to-night. He is very English, fair and florid, and rather attractive."

"That isn't very strong language."

"He's clever, too. He paints a little, and writes a little. He had a very bad picture in the Academy one year, and he has published two tolerably good books of travel. He is the sort of man who passes for very brilliant in the army, but he wouldn't be considered so elsewhere."

"And yet you really care for him?"

"If so, it isn't for his talents. He has other qualifications."

"What are they?"

"In the first place, he is very nice. I use the word *nice*, because it is vague. It means much or little, or anything or nothing; and I will leave you to make the interpretation."

"And in the second place?"

"He is very rich. He inherited Keston and a lot of money two years ago from some sort of uncle. Then, he has prospects. He is heir presumptive to his brother, the Earl of Ullswater, and of course that means—"

"Yes, I see. And is there a third place?"

"He is very influential. It would be a good thing for the children to be under such a man as he, and naturally a mother always thinks first of—"

"Naturally," said Petrina, dryly, stealing a glance at Lady de Bohun's face, but seeing nothing but an air of seraphic sweetness.

"I ought to say that I am not positively sure of his attitude. The affair is as yet only in the platonic stage."

"And might remain there?"

"Yes; or he might even—recede. I can't quite make him out. He has compromised a lot of people, and yet with me he has never taken the slightest liberty."

"I should take that as a sign that he is serious."

"I do; but a sign is not a certainty. Men are like the weather. They often promise sunshine, and then shift round and give you showers."

"So that you want to be sure of the new love before you are quite off with the old?"

"That isn't just my attitude. If the new love offers itself I should like to be free to accept it or reject it, as I chose. But I know I should be horribly mortified if I took the trouble to make myself free, and then the new love didn't come. Now you see my perplexity."

"Yes," said Petrina. "But I think you might assure yourself beforehand—"

"That next year will be a good year for roses. My dear, the one is as easy as the other."

Petrina did not reply. For a long time the two sat silent, gazing absently over the landscape of billowy green—each busy with her own thoughts.

"You said, I think, that Harry's friend, Mr. Lechmere, was coming to dinner too?"

"Yes. He is spending Sunday with Gerald at Keston Castle."

"We saw his wife the other night, at the Carlton House Hotel."

"Oh, Felicia. Isn't she charming?"

"It was at a distance, and one couldn't be quite sure. Do you know her?"

"Well."

"I should like immensely to meet her."

"Any time you please, dear. I will ask you and Harry to lunch or dine with her the next time I am in town."

"No; not Harry. He doesn't like women of that kind."

"Then it is just as well for him. But if Humphrey had been like that I should be beating my wings now like a canary in a cage. Thank the Lord, at least that door is open."

"Tell me all about Madame de Prony. She rather fascinates me."

"I couldn't tell you all about her if I wrote a book. She's the most extraordinary creature!"

"Is she nice?"

"Yes; if, as I said just now, you take *nice* as a vague word, admitting of any interpretation."

"Is she—how shall I put it?—is she a lady?"

"Lady is also vague; but if you take the word in its very vaguest sense, she is."

"Then I wonder that you know her so well."

"Oh, one meets her everywhere now. They say her character would make her a celebrity even if she hadn't a voice; so naturally people are glad to have her; she makes their parties talked about, and that, of course, is everything. I wonder, though, why you should take such an interest in her? Is it on account of Dick?"

"Partly; but I am always attracted by those of whom the world speaks evil."

"You will find Felicia a perfect magnet, then. You knew Dick wanted her to take him back, didn't you?"

"No! Really?"

"Poor Dick. His is the grand passion of which one sees so few examples nowadays. I scarcely know whether to class him as a hero or a fool. Yes, he hunted her up in Vienna on his return from America, and begged her to begin all over again. Of course she laughed him to scorn. She would as soon think of going back to last year's fashions. She isn't exactly bad, you know—"

"What *is* bad?" Petrina asked.

"Well, that's just it. Notions about good and bad differ so just now that it is almost impossible to define one's terms. *I* don't think her bad; but then some people are so dreadfully narrow on that subject. Felicia hasn't any conscience, and a heart only from time to time; and that's the worst you can say of her."

"Do you think she ever really cared for him?"

"She never so nearly cared for any one else."

"That isn't saying much."

"It *is* for her. She has never forgiven him for divorcing her; and I don't think that now poor Dick forgives himself."

"And yet he couldn't have—"

"Oh, no. It was too patent—too public. He was becoming a mere jest. She concealed nothing; and Dick isn't a Lord Yorkshire."

"Then how is he now?"

"Down—terribly down, poor old boy. I am often afraid that he'll do something to himself. He's that sort, you know. It wouldn't astonish me in the least."

"Perhaps Harry can help him."

"I think you can, too."

"I should like to," said Petrina, softly. "I will try."

CHAPTER V

AS they left the church Hippolyta stopped to speak to an elderly lady in the habit of a religious order. Vassall waited. Tristram trudged off homeward.

"Who is that?" Vassall asked, when Hippolyta came up to him. He looked after the nun, who had joined a company of some twenty sisters dressed like herself, in flowing veils and mantles.

"That is the Mother Superior of the Sisters of St. Luke the Physician, who have their house of rest near here. They go about nursing the sick poor in their own homes."

"Moving like that amid the blossoming may, they look like the procession of nuns in the last act of 'Cyrano de Bergerac.'"

"They do a noble work," said Hippolyta, gravely, as she and Vassall passed through the churchyard to take the path towards Orpington Park.

"Uncle Harry," said the girl, after a pause, "do you think mother would ever consent to my going into St. Luke's and becoming one of the order?"

She flushed and spoke timidly. Vassall hesitated before replying.

"Aren't you too young to think of it?" he asked.

"Too young to decide, perhaps, but not too young to think."

"Before taking so serious a step, a girl ought to know not only what she is going to, but what she is, giving up. She should see something of the world before renouncing it."

"But I have seen so much."

Vassall glanced sharply at his niece, who walked on with head uplifted, like a Zenobia in chains, as Lady de Bohun had said at breakfast.

"You are only eighteen," said Vassall, with a smile.

"And yet I know more than many a woman of twenty-eight."

"You are scarcely out of school."

"My school has been there," she said, pointing to the long, gray house, now visible upon its terraced hill.

"In one's own home—" Vassall began.

"There are many lessons," she interrupted, "and I've learned them all. There are some things about which there isn't much left for me to know. If I entered the convent to-day, it would be with no illusions whatever about the life I was leaving behind."

"There is an age at which we all feel that."

"With me it is no question of age. I have never been young, not any more than Tristram is young. They tell us that young people shouldn't know what we know. How can we be ignorant when we see the things we see and hear the things we hear. There was a time, so my grandmother de Bohun says, when children were innocent. If so, it was in the days when parents were reticent. How can we be young when our father and mother live apart? Of course there is a reason for their doing so, and how can we not guess what that reason is?"

"But it is just here that young people's guesses are so likely to be wrong."

"How can we go wrong when we have listened all our lives to the table-talk of people like the Duchess of Ambleside and Madame de Prony and Major Bertie, and others whom it was an indiscretion merely to allow us to know? Only on Thursday Tristram and I went

over with mother to lunch at Keston Castle. They talked of Lord and Lady Yorkshire and Mr. Amos; and do you suppose we didn't understand? The very winks and nods with which they reminded each other that there were two young people at the table emphasized the points we ought not to have perceived. Tristram is fifteen. He is at a school where the other boys bring from their homes as much improper information as he picks up in his. He is naturally a good boy. He has a keen moral sense and something very sterling in his nature. He hates all this—this impropriety. It revolts him. But the boys at his school make a joke of it, and he is growing to do it too. Oh, Uncle Harry, do use your influence with mamma to let me go into the convent."

"I will talk of it with her, if you like, but you couldn't take any such step for a long while to come."

"I should be willing to wait if only I had the hope of one day being free."

"You call that being free? I should say it was bondage."

"Yes, I know how you feel. But you haven't lived my life, Uncle Harry. You don't know what it is to love your parents without being able to respect them."

"Don't you think you ought to try not to judge your elders more than you can help?"

"I do try. I know my father is good. I know mamma is good. And yet—"

"And yet what?"

"I don't know. There is something very wrong, though I cannot say what it is. I feel it here. I know it. I live in it. But when you ask me to define it, it escapes me. It is like the necklet mother gave me this morning. It was kind of her. She did it because she loves me. And yet I can never wear it."

"You must wear it. Your mother would be hurt if you didn't."

"I never could, Uncle Harry. It would sting me. I should feel as if I were wearing shame."

"I think you exaggerate, Hippolyta."

"Nothing could exaggerate what I should feel. Didn't you hear Tristram say how mamma paid for it? She didn't pay for it. Mr. Lechmere and Major Bertie, and so many others, paid for it."

"But public opinion recognizes gambling."

"I don't," she said, proudly. "If you had seen, as I saw, not a month ago, when we were last at Claridge's, Mrs. Tredelly biting her lip to keep back the tears when she lost I don't know how much money, after she had been to dinner with mamma; if you had heard, as I heard, Mr. Hartley Payne go cursing away from the hotel because he too had lost more than he could afford, you would know why I would wear drops of blood or beads of fire round my neck rather than the pearls their money paid for."

Vassall glanced again at the girl. She still walked on with head erect; but a deep spot of scarlet was burning on each cheek. He had too much sympathy with her point of view to dare to counsel her.

"I think your mother would be hurt if you didn't wear the necklace," he repeated.

"I couldn't," she replied, and he said no more.

In the afternoon, between tea and dinner, he found an opportunity to confide to his wife something of what Hippolyta had said in the morning.

"Those nuns have turned her head," Petrina commented. "Perhaps it isn't unnatural at her age; but of course it will pass. She will feel differently after she is presented and begins to go out a bit. I am afraid,

Harry, that she has something of the Vassall tendency towards self-righteousness."

"If so, it flourishes on very stony ground," he replied, with a slight flush. "I can't imagine how any one could live in the surroundings in which poor Hippolyta has grown up and yet remain self-righteous. As a matter of fact, she has a sense of always touching pitch—"

"And of therefore being defiled. That is only her inexperience. As one grows older one learns how to toss that sticky substance from hand to hand, and yet keep clean."

"I know that women think so nowadays, but it is a very dangerous game."

"That is what makes it so diverting. A sportsman like you must know the excitement of risk; and, socially speaking, there is no risk without something *risqué*."

"I am not of your opinion," he said, moodily.

"Do you know," she laughed, "that is one of the things I like about you? You're immensely impressive as a man. Nobody ever forgets you or passes you by. And yet you are as prudish as an old maid—only that old maids aren't prudish any longer. They're often the very worst. The things I've heard them tell would make your hair stand on end. But that's what I like. Your hair *would* stand on end; while that of most people wouldn't."

"What nonsense!"

"Not a bit. It's a fact. You still keep something of the bloom on the peach, and that's so rare. I wouldn't for anything have you hear some of the stories told in Princess Hans's smoking-room. And when we go back to Boston Mrs. Bowdoin Somerset's beer-and-cheese receptions on Sunday nights will startle you."

"Do you mean to tell me that you go to *them*?"

"Yes, dear; and, please God, you will too. Oh, there's the dressing-bell. Poor Hippolyta! If she doesn't wear the thing, there will be trouble. Look here, Harry. Go away and let me dress. I'll do it quickly. Then I shall go to her. I am sure I could talk her into reason."

The task was difficult, but Petrina's confidence in herself was justified. When she entered the drawing-room, a little late for dinner, Hippolyta was at her side. The girl wore the string of pearls. Her downcast eyes and look of shame passed for the shyness incidental to a first real dinner dress.

"Petrina made me see the matter differently," she whispered to Vassall as they went in to dinner. "I was wrong in setting my own judgment up above mamma's."

At table the company fell naturally into pairs—Petrina and Lechmere, Hippolyta and Vassall, Lady de Bohun and Major Bertie.

"So Orpington Park is to give another beauty to the county," Bertie remarked as they took their places; he smiled towards Hippolyta as he spoke.

"All the girls are beauties where Major the Honorable Gerald Bertie goes to dine," Hippolyta replied, with a toss of the head.

"Doubtless," he retorted. "But among the Amazons, Hippolyta alone was queen."

"For the Lord's sake, Gerald, don't be mythological," Lady de Bohun cried, beginning to eat her soup.

"It's so fatiguing on the day of rest," Lechmere drawled. "That's the worst of a Saturday to Monday at Bertie's. One's mind gets no sabbatical repose."

"Living with the clever," Petrina observed, "is like living with the rich. In trying to keep their pace one goes beyond one's means."

"I've found it so at Bertie's," Lechmere rejoined.

"And the effort to keep up is killing, especially on a Sunday."

"What is there about a Sunday," Petrina asked, "which makes one feel so much more wicked than one does on a week-day?"

"And unconventional," added Lechmere.

"It's the same thing," said Bertie. "Virtue is only long-standing convention. Vice is only its transgression."

"Exactly," Petrina assented. "But the taste for it always seems to be strongest on Sundays. If there is anything *canaille* in one's nature—"

"And there always is," Bertie declared.

"It is called forth on a Sunday evening," Petrina pursued.

"Like this," Lechmere interposed.

"Like this," Petrina repeated, "as at no other time. During the week one is content to be decently *décolletée* and to drink champagne. On Sunday one wants—"

"To be indecently *décolletée* and to drink absinthe," Bertie finished.

"I wasn't going to say that," Petrina laughed. "I was thinking chiefly of Mrs. Bowdoin Somerset's beer-and-cheese receptions on Sunday nights in Boston, of which my husband and I were speaking before dinner. Somehow they suit a Sunday night. One would never think of going to such a thing on a week-night. One wears a high dress and a hat, and one meets all kinds of actors and German musicians and a sort of literary tag-rag-and-bobtail who seem made to fall in with one's humor on the Lord's Day. One eats bread-and-cheese, and drinks beer (and I hate beer, as a rule!), as though there were something sanctified in the diet. Then one goes home feeling that one has passed an

edifying Sunday evening. As a matter of fact, it is rather low—"

"For a refined person that's its charm," said Lechmere.

"Yes, but why?" Petrina insisted. "On a week-day vulgarity is detestable. Why, then, on Sunday?"

"Ah, Mrs. Vassall, there you touch on one of the deepest mysteries of existence," Bertie sighed, sententiously. "The best of us have a taste for something bad; the sweetest of us a craving for something acid. It gives our life a flavor, like the slice of lemon-peel in a cocktail. You can't explain it, any more than you can explain why a man who has a lovely and cultivated wife should neglect her for some vulgar—"

"Gerald," said Lady de Bohun, severely, "don't forget that Hippolyta is at the table."

"You don't really see what I mean—" Petrina began.

"No, dear; but I do," Lady de Bohun interrupted. "Petrina means this," she went on, with a comprehensive glance around the company. "Granted that there is something of the devil in us all, why should it seize the Lord's Day more than any other day on which to show itself? I understand her perfectly. It is simply because it *is* the Lord's Day. It is just like the desire, which I suppose every woman has, to tempt St. Anthony. It's because it *is* St. Anthony. If he were any one else, one wouldn't care. I never see a bishop, especially a celibate one, without wanting to—"

Lady de Bohun caught her brother's eye and stopped.

"Without wanting to—?" asked Bertie. "We are all attention."

"Without wanting to discuss with him the Apostolical Succession. You thought I was going to say something else, didn't you, old Father Time?" she added, looking at Vassall.

"I was thinking less of you than of Hippolyta," he answered.

"I'm used to it, Uncle Harry," the girl whispered.

"And, by Jove! you've got some excuse," cried Bertie. "It's a case of *filia pulchra*, even if it's *mater pulchrior*."

"She does look nice, doesn't she?" Lady de Bohun commented, as though her daughter were not there.

"How delightful it is," said Petrina, "to be Hippolyta's age and look as she does in a white muslin frock that can't have cost ten pounds!"

"And yet," Lechmere said, softly, in Petrina's ear, "the flower in blossom is more beautiful than that in the bud. Your frock must have cost—"

"Fifty pounds," said Petrina.

"But then there is more than fifty times the charm."

"Do you know what I should like?" she said, letting her voice fall, and speaking for him alone. "I should like to have our acquaintance pass out of the stage of giving and receiving compliments and come into that where one talks mind to mind."

"That is, you are offering me your friendship."

"If you care to have it."

"If I told you how much I do care—"

"You needn't do that. That is a thing best left to be divined."

"I understand you. Love has a golden speech, but friendship a golden silence. Very well, then. We are friends."

"Good friends," said Petrina, looking him in the eyes. She was sorry for him. She noticed how much older he looked than when they had last met. His dark hair was already slightly silvered.

"Thank you," said Lechmere. "One of these days you may see how much I need you."

"What are you two muttering about?" cried Lady de Bohun, turning away from Bertie. "Dick, I am in the act of giving the devil his due, and I want to complete the operation. I have just been telling Gerald the share he has had in the handsome birthday present I have been able to give my daughter. Look at that row of pearls. They didn't come from the French Diamond Company in the Burlington Arcade. They will bear inspection by the expert. They cost me just eight hundred pounds. If I hadn't lost that two hundred at Winkfield Abbey—well, we won't talk about that. It's too sore a subject. The loss is poor Hippolyta's more than mine. However, Dick, your contribution was just fifty-eight pounds, ten shillings. I've kept an accurate account ever since I first began to save my poor winnings for this happy day."

"I am sure that I never spent fifty-eight pound ten so well in my life before," Lechmere murmured, looking across the table at Hippolyta.

The girl sat confused and speechless, using all her self-control to resist the impulse to tear the thing from her neck and fling it from her.

"Be brave," Vassall whispered, under cover of the conversation. "Your mother doesn't understand."

"I know" she whispered in return, biting her lips to keep back the tears. "But you can see how I have learned my lessons about life."

"We will have the coffee in the card-room," said Lady de Bohun, at the end of dinner. "I am sure you men would rather come with us there than be left together here."

"It would be a privilege," said Bertie.

"And what shall we play?" Lady de Bohun asked, with a glance around. "We're too many for bridge."

Vassall looked across the table at his wife.

"I think we will not play to-night, Emmy," he said, significantly.

"You mean Hippolyta and you," Petrina interposed, quickly. "Very well. That will make us just four, so that it can be bridge."

As she spoke she did not take her eyes from his. Vassall knew that her words implied a challenge. He curbed his impulse to speak, and rose with the rest.

"Let us go out on the terrace," Hippolyta murmured, taking her uncle's arm, while Lady de Bohun and Petrina, followed by Bertie and Lechmere, swept out of the room. "I don't want any coffee."

"Nor I," said Vassall. "Let us go out and listen for a nightingale."

The card-room at Orpington Park was an afterthought on the part of the late Sir Tristram de Bohun, Sir Humphrey's father. It was a little pavilion at the extreme eastern end of the mansion. It had windows on all sides, and was reached through the conservatory.

The night was hot, and the windows were open. As Vassall and Hippolyta paced the terrace they could see the light streaming outward and hear the sounds of laughter. They talked of the possibility of the girl's going to America with her uncle and spending the winter with her grandmother in Old Cambridge.

As they walked up and down they instinctively turned on their steps before they reached the pavilion. Growing more interested in the idea of the visit, they ceased to note the exact direction they were taking. Suddenly they found themselves beneath the open windows of the card-room, with the view of those within. The four were seated at a table on which were cards and counters. They were not playing. The men had drinks before them. Lady de Bohun and Petrina were smoking cigarettes. Hip-



A Vitagraph Production. *Let Not Man Put Asunder.*

"WHAT AM I MAKING OF MYSELF," PETRINA ASKED HERSELF. "I MUST BE MAD, FOR I AM LECHMERE'S WIFE!"

polyta was so accustomed to the sight that she wondered at her uncle's sharp exclamation of surprise. She wondered still more as he turned quickly away and in a harsh voice bade her go in, as though she were still a child.

CHAPTER VI

"GOOD-NIGHT," said Petrina, hurrying into the boudoir which separated her room from her husband's. "I'm longing for my bed. Tobacco always makes me sleepy."

Vassall looked up from his book. He was reading beside a small table on which a lamp was burning. Petrina was radiant, her color heightened, her eyes sparkling. The evening had excited her. Vassall's absence from the card-room had taken a restraint from the talk, which had not gone beyond the limits of clever innuendo, and yet had been amusing. While glad that her husband had not been there, she was concious of a certain irritation at his inability to hold his own among those whom she called "people of the world."

As she looked at him now in his careless dress of the late evening — his hair disordered, his shirt-bosom rumpled, and his cravat awry—she could not help comparing his negligence with the starched correctness of the men who had just gone back to Keston Castle. Bertie was metropolitan; Lechmere, cosmopolitan; Vassall, undeniably provincial.

"Don't go yet," he said, putting aside his book; "I want to talk to you. Sit down a minute."

"For mercy's sake, Harry, put your cravat straight," she said with a yawn, sinking, as she spoke, into an arm-chair. "I hope you're not going to be the sort of man who sits with his feet on the table because there is no one present but his wife."

Vassall looked at her gravely, trying to conceal his anger. His disapproval of the conversation at dinner had been followed by annoyance at the scene in the card-room. This had in turn given way to indignation that Petrina should have so ignored the principles of propriety and good taste. He had tried to recover his temper by burying himself in a book, and had almost succeeded when Petrina's hurried entry and prompt good-night stirred again not only his unquenched anger but a little latent jealousy as well.

"Is it straight now?" he said, meekly, pulling at his cravat.

"Oh, I suppose so. If you would only have a valet, like any other man—"

"I'm not used to a valet. Very few men of my position in Boston are."

"Mercy on us, Harry, can you never get out of that groove? I didn't marry you to keep you in your position, but to put you in mine."

Petrina regretted the words, but they were spoken.

"In yours?" he said, coldly. "What is yours? The only position you have, as far as I am aware, is that of my wife. And in future—"

"Yes, Harry? In future—?"

"I shall ask you to be more worthy of it than you have been to-night."

She sat upright. Her face grew white—as white as the whiteness of her bosom against the blackness of her dress.

"How insolent you provincial people are!" she said, in a low voice. "I have noticed it in your mother."

"We will leave my mother out of the discussion. The question is not of her duty, but of yours."

With a great effort she regained her self-command.

"If you will excuse me I will go now," she said, rising. "I don't want you to say what you will be sorry for."

"Sit down, Petrina," he ordered, sternly, not moving from his own seat.

She obeyed him.

"If you insist on speaking, of course I must hear you," she said, with constraint. "But I ask you to remember that I am not a forgiving person. I am not accustomed to insult."

"Look here, Petrina, my darling," he began, in another tone, leaning forward and attempting to take her hand.

"By-the-by, Harry," she interrupted, skilfully moving her hand beyond his reach, "while I think of it, let me ask you not to treat me to so many endearing epithets. They are awfully *bourgeois*. Among people of our world they are as out of date as snuff. Now, will you go on, please?"

She leaned back in her chair, and slowly waved her large black fan.

"What I want to say is this. You and I are simple New England people, with simple New England ways."

"Granted," she admitted, languidly. "But there is *manière et manière* of being simple, just as one man's New England may not be another's."

"We have certain conventions and certain principles and certain prejudices—"

"*À qui le dites-vous?*" she sighed.

"And I cannot think it right for either you or me—"

"Suppose you were to follow your ideas of right and leave me to follow mine? Wouldn't that be liberty of conscience?"

"A man can hardly live like that with his wife. He is responsible—"

"What a dangerous word."

"Responsible for her actions as the guardian of his honor—"

"Oh, la, la!"

"And he is bound to see that she conducts herself in a manner consistent with his dignity and her own."

"Mr. Lechmere and I," she began, assuming a tone of cordial discussion, "have just been talking of that very thing. Now his ideas—"

"I am not interested to know them," Vassall broke in, sharply. "I care only that you should attend to mine." A sudden pang of jealousy loosened what was left of his self-restraint.

"But you're so prosy," Petrina laughed, with an affectation of composure. "And I'm dying with sleep. Mr. Lechmere is such a good talker—"

"I'm sorry that I cannot be as interesting as he; therefore I shall be brief and to the point."

"Thanks."

"Then let me say that I object to your indifference towards great moral ideas which we are brought up to respect."

"We?" she questioned, with a nervous laugh.

"I object to your disregard for a day which we are brought up to revere."

"You are quite forensic, Harry. One would think that you were addressing a jury."

"I object, above all, to the covert indecency of the conversation you permit yourself and others to carry on."

"Really, Harry, your language is most archaic. If you want to talk about indecency—"

"Don't mock at what I say, Petrina!"

"I? Surely I am taking you as seriously as if your words deserved attention. My courtesy is such that I haven't left you and gone to bed. Most other women in my place—"

"Would not have given me the ground of complaint I have against you. Most other women in your place would not have spent Sunday evening in smoking and playing cards."

"Really nice women would, as Emmy might say. You see, Harry, you don't know your world. You are so narrow and illiberal and spiritually puffed-up that you don't realize that there is such a thing as progress. You're so Hebraic that you're still back in the times of Abraham and Sarah. Of course, I knew that when I married you, but I didn't think you were going to prove—"

"Such a tyrant?" he said, with a forced smile and with a new effort to turn the current of the conversation from one of bitterness into that of banter.

"Oh, no. Not at all. I don't say that you are a tyrant. A tyrant must be strong."

"Only a just and constitutional king, then?" He rose, and, standing above her, tried again to take her hand.

"I should hardly say that."

"What, then? What am I?"

"Well, nothing in particular. In marrying you I gave you privileges, but I never meant to confer rights. Sit down, Harry, please. Let me give you my point of view."

"Haven't we talked enough for to-night?"

He tried to speak good-naturedly.

"Not quite, for I want to say a word on my side. I have borne your conversation with good temper, because I see that I have brought you into a society where you have still much to learn. You are a less intelligent pupil than I expected you to be, but I can be patient."

"Then I'll be hanged if I can," he cried, with renewed

irritation. "Look here, Petrina; I know your society through and through, and I find it putrid."

"This is no question of what you find—"

"It is a society which puts evil for good, and darkness for light, and bitter for sweet, and whose only cleverness is in its skill in turning the straightforward into paradox."

"If that is your opinion of modern society—"

"I am not speaking of modern society. I am speaking only of one of its smallest, noisiest, and nastiest sections—the section which Emmy—"

"And I."

"Not you—which Emmy appears to think the only one worthy of a thought in London, Paris, or New York. It is metropolitan only in being mixed; it is cosmopolitan only in confusing the characteristic differences between races, and putting the hybrid in the place of the pure. The French liberty of speech which such women as Emmy—"

"And I."

"Affect—"

"Don't you think that your use of the word French is rather narrow? In an Englishman it would be insular; in an American it can only be a little—you must excuse the word—a little underbred."

"I think I can correct you on both those points."

"Correction is a weakness of yours, isn't it?"

"When I say that Emmy's license of speech is French I use the proper adjective. Only I know why it is French and Emmy doesn't. She is one of the women who show their cultivation by being able to read Octave Mirbeau and Pierre Louÿs and Madame Marni, and who—"

"Don't hesitate to include me among them."

"I do include you. I should not have ventured to

name these authors in your presence had I not seen their productions lying on your table."

"You have read them, of course?"

"Until they made me rather sick."

"You can spare me your physical symptoms."

"You find that offensive because I speak in English. That is precisely the point I am coming to. You cannot graft Gallic freedom of expression upon our Anglo-Saxon instinct for restraint. It is the point of which Emmy and her friends are ignorant. There are many things possible to say with decency in French which in English become gross. There are many things which a Frenchwoman can talk of with perfect propriety, but which on the lips of an English or American woman are little short of foul."

"You seem to be wonderfully versed in the subject."

"I am. One has to be. The deterioration of our women, English and American alike, obliges us men to seek the cause."

"And you find it in—?"

"God be thanked, in ignorance rather than in evil."

"You are fond of that word ignorance."

"Not fond, but only forced to use it. The women of the world to which you say you belong have just the little knowledge which is dangerous. I take Emmy as an illustration—"

"Why not take me?"

"I prefer Emmy. She feeds her mind on the worst of French light reading, and fancies that it is French literature. She fills her head with tales of marital infidelity, and calls it French morality. She talks fluently of the *cocu* and the *cocotte,* and thinks she is speaking of French society. She is ignorant of the fact that there is a great and noble France of which she will not read a word in the pages of Gyp or Guy de Maupassant."

"When you say Emmy, of course you mean me. I want you to make that point clear."

"I mean a large number of the young American and English women of the upper classes of the present day. They try to be *chic*, but only cease to be charming. They try to be original, but only become coarse. They try to be progressive, but only succeed in going back to the grossness of *Tristram Shandy* and *Tom Jones.* There," Vassall broke off with a laugh. "You thought you were going to escape a Sunday sermon, but it has overtaken you even at the eleventh hour."

"And I've been the text," said Petrina, looking down ruefully at her hands, and then glancing up at him, with an air of penitence.

He took her hand again, and this time it was not withdrawn. So the threatened storm passed by, and a little later they said good-night.

But at the door of her own room Petrina turned. Vassall stood looking after her. She was moved by a sudden impulse which came she knew not whence.

"'The little rift within the lute,'" she quoted.

"Oh, Petrina, don't say it," he cried, taking a step forward, his hands outstretched as if in pleading.

"'The little rift within the lute,'" she repeated, deliberately, but with her sphinx-like smile, "'which by-and-by may make the music mute.'"

Then she closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER VII

A MILESTONE is reached in married life when husband and wife recognize the limitations to what each can expect from the other. When Vassall and Petrina met on Monday morning both were aware of something more precise in their relations. It was as if that around which there had been a golden aureole had become defined by the daylight. With the first moment face to face there was a consciousness that some of their romance was gone. In their mutual regard there was not less love, but there was less illusion. They had parted at night with the kiss of reconciliation, but they met in the morning in a spirit of silent strife. Petrina was too positive to admit his claim to be master; Vassall too certain that he was right to be able to concede.

So, with their return to London, a life of drawing apart began. She was determined to impose her tastes, he to carry out his principles. When he yielded to her, it was without willingness. When she deferred to him, it was without grace.

Soon they passed another milestone. It was when they found that there was no satisfaction in making concessions to each other. Then Petrina began to go her way, Vassall his. They spent their time more pleasantly, but each was moved by some resentment towards the other because they were apart.

"It will be different," Vassall said to himself, "when we return to Boston. There our life will be spent

quietly, and she will lose the taste for all this noise and show."

"When we return to Boston," Petrina mused, "and begin ourselves to entertain, he will see things from another point of view. He will understand that what he thinks vanity is duty, and that what he calls frivolity is life."

"I never see Mr. Vassall now," the Duchess of Ambleside complained, when Petrina met her one evening at the Foreign Office. "I hear he's quite an early Christian. That must be so bad for him. Why doesn't he go about more?"

"I wish you would take him in hand, Duchess."

"But I'm simply dying to."

"I'm sure he'd go anywhere if he thought you'd be there."

"Then tell him to come to tea at Lady Yorkshire's to-morrow afternoon. I shall be there at five precisely. Tell him he'll find me in that little annex to her drawing-room, where hardly any one ever goes. I'll make an excuse for sitting in there alone. I'll say I have a sudden palpitation of the heart. I do have 'em sometimes, especially when I've eaten radishes."

"I'll tell him, Duchess, and if anything can arouse him, I know that will."

But Vassall did not go to Lady Yorkshire's. While the Duchess was calming her agitated heart in the annex, Vassall and Petrina were closeted with Sir Humphrey de Bohun at his chambers in Pall Mall for the discussion of grave family affairs.

"Come to me at once at Claridge's," Lady de Bohun had telegraphed that morning to Petrina, who obeyed the summons promptly.

She found Emilia prostrated, but pretty, in a white lace robe, with one big bow ending in long, filmy

streamers of shaded reds, fastened at her breast. She was lying on a sofa in a little sitting-room.

"I've done it," she gasped, as Petrina entered. "I've taken the step."

"What step, dear?" Petrina asked, as she kissed her sister-in-law.

"The divorce. I've told Sir Charles Freeman to go on with it. They were to serve something on Humphrey this morning, poor fellow. I don't know what it is, but they said they'd serve it."

Petrina looked grave, and sat down on the edge of the sofa, holding the while Emilia's hand.

"Does Hippolyta know?"

"Nothing yet. She mustn't be told till I get my decree *nisi*, whatever that is. She's here in town with her grandmother in Cromwell Road."

"And Tristram?"

"Safe at Dr. Babbington's. He needn't know for a long time—not until Gerald and I—"

"Then you are sure—?"

"Oh yes. That's all right. I know he means it."

"And you?"

"I haven't committed myself. As things are, he has bound himself and—"

"Left you free?"

"Of course, Petrina dear, my position is extremely delicate. I couldn't become engaged to one man as long as I am married to another? Now, could I? Reginalda de la Pole did it, and I know it's common in America; but one has to draw the line at something, and I do it there. He's given me this," she added, drawing from the bosom of her dress a ring fastened on a long gold chain. "I told him I couldn't wear it, but that I'd just keep it here."

"But you've accepted it from him. That must mean that you—"

"Oh, I suppose I'm coming to it, dear. It's a good deal to face, but I'm getting used to the idea. It's of the children I think. He's so fond of children! And it will be good for Tristram to have a father."

"But there's Humphrey."

"I mean a *real* father, dear—a real, paternal father; not one who's made himself talked of with half the Lucy Fitzalans and Hetty Viennes in London."

"But you told me yourself that Major Bertie had compromised a lot of people."

"My head aches, dear. Don't let us talk about such dreadfully deep things this morning. Let me tell you why I've asked you to come. I want you to do something for me."

"Anything, dear Emilia."

"Yes; I knew you would. Well, it's Harry and mother: you see I've got to consider them to some extent. I wouldn't for anything ignore their feelings in so important a matter."

"But, considering how they feel, I don't see how you're going to reconcile them to it."

"Nor I, quite. But there's no one who can manage it so well as you, dear. You must break the news to Harry, and he must put it as gently as he can to mother. Oh, dear! I know they'll make a fuss; just as if I hadn't enough to bear. They're so terribly behindhand in their ideas. They're back in the Middle Ages. And even then people were divorced. There was Henry the Eighth, and lots of others that I could look up if I had an encyclopædia. Even Milton wrote in favor of it. But I want you to go back and tell him. Tell him how I have struggled against it, until my wrongs cry out to Heaven for redress. Don't prejudice him against

Humphrey, though. I know you won't do that. But just make him feel that I've suffered right up to the verge of endurance; and that Humphrey has been not so much wicked as weak. Make it all as moral as you can, because that's the joint in their harness—morality is. I'm sure you'll know how to do it, dear; you've so much tact. Quote the nineteenth chapter of St. Matthew at them. You can give it a twist that will make it just suit my case. Don't say anything about Gerald—at least not yet. We must feed them with milk, you know, and not with meat. That's in the Bible, too. I feel sure, dear Petrina, that I can leave it all safely in your hands."

"It goes without saying, Emmy, that I will do everything in my power. To whom should you turn at such a crisis rather than to me? Even if I didn't approve—"

"Which you do, don't you?"

"I can't be wholly sure of that; but even if I didn't, I should stand by you."

"You're such a treasure to me," Lady de Bohun said, tenderly pressing Petrina's hand. "I shall never forget your kindness; and if ever you want to do anything like this, you will be able to count on my help, as I have on yours. It's true that it's early yet in your married life, and Harry is a saint; but if it *should* happen—"

The baffling smile was on Petrina's lips as she interrupted her sister-in-law and rose from the border of the couch.

"I ought to go back to the hotel now," she said; "then I can get it over by telling Harry at luncheon."

CHAPTER VIII

To Petrina's surprise, Vassall himself opened up the subject as soon as the waiter had left them alone at table.

"I suppose I know the motive of your errand to Emmy," he said. "I've just had a note from Humphrey. He wants us to go round to his chambers this afternoon to confer with him. Have you any other engagement?"

"None that I can't put off. So he knows?"

"Apparently. He doesn't write as if he were taken by surprise."

"He could hardly be. But you, Harry?"

"Not more than Humphrey, I suppose. With a woman of Emmy's character, one must always be prepared for the unexpected."

"She asked me to break it to you gently; but I see the blow has fallen less heavily than I feared. I fancied, after the things you have said on the subject of divorce—"

"One modifies one's views as one grows older," Vassall remarked, with a queer smile.

"But you haven't had time to grow much older since we last talked of it."

"There are crises when we count by experience rather than by years."

Petrina looked at him keenly.

"Does that mean that our own marriage has disappointed you?"

"The very question is an injury," he replied, with a laugh. "But I suppose it is only the married who know how serious a thing marriage is. No one can realize beforehand the meaning of a permanent community of life."

"Of course not, if you look at it in that light. But you know it isn't modern. To *us* marriage is a temporary co-operation rather than a permanent community. I could never have married if I thought otherwise, not any more than I could have taken the lifelong vows of a nun."

Petrina spoke deliberately, and was surprised that Vassall did not resent her speech.

"I used to think that there ought to be no loop-hole. Now—"

"Now," Petrina laughed, "you begin to see that the day may come when you will be glad enough to find one."

"I wish you wouldn't give my words so personal an application."

"Women can never argue in the abstract, Harry. They must be personal, or they can't enjoy the talk. But I am glad that you admit that marriage isn't necessarily binding."

"I don't admit anything. I say only that lately I have reviewed my own ideas, and I am not quite so sure as I used to be. That's all."

"I've been looking up the nineteenth chapter of St. Matthew. We are told there that there was a time when even Moses suffered a man to give his wife a writing of divorcement."

"But it was only for the hardness of men's hearts."

"Hearts are always hard, Harry. They are certainly not softer now than they were in the days of Sinai. But my point is this, that, even accepting the

Christian view of things, marriage is an institution regulated by a law which can be changed from time to time according to human needs. In one age it is monogamous, in another it is polygamous. In one it is for life; in another it may be ended by a writing of divorcement."

"But the Church has decreed—"

"You forget that marriage existed before the Church."

"And the needs of civilized society demand—"

"Marriage is older than civilized society."

"That, for the sake of the family—"

"I know what you're going to say; but the family can be protected in more ways than one. I repeat that my point is this, that never since the world began has marriage been a hard-and-fast relation in which change or termination was impossible. In the Christian Scriptures it is a very vague condition, and varies with the needs of different generations. I contend, therefore, that what was permitted for the hardness of men's hearts in the time of Moses ought not to be denied to the equal hardness of men's hearts to-day."

And yet Petrina felt it binding on her to assume an attitude of gentle reproof when she arrived at Sir Humphrey de Bohun's chambers, later in the afternoon.

"Well, Humphrey," she said, as she shook hands, "this is a great pity; but if there is anything that we can do—"

The baronet smiled, and ordered his man to bring in the tea.

In a little while the three were discussing the arrangements to be made for the comfort of Lady de Bohun and her children. Vassall could not but be satisfied with his brother-in-law's liberality.

"It's a beastly nuisance that the newspapers have got hold of it," Sir Humphrey said, taking his cup from

Petrina. "How they learn such things the Lord only knows."

"We haven't seen anything," Vassall said, wondering; "nor heard anything."

"No, I suppose not," Sir Humphrey went on, "but no doubt you soon will. It's in a penny rag called *English Society*. Yes, that blue-covered thing," he added, as he saw Petrina's glance fall upon it. "The Duchess of Ambleside sent it to me with a note this morning."

"Well, I never!" Petrina exclaimed, as she looked at a paragraph marked in red pencil. "'We understand,'" she read aloud, "'that another social sensation is promised in the action for divorce to be brought by the wife of a well-known baronet, whose country seat is not a thousand miles from Orpington, in Kent. The lady in question is one of the prettiest and wittiest of the American women who gave an exotic flavor to London life, while the co-respondent is said to be a charming young actress at the Charing Cross Theatre. Her name resembles that of one of the great capitals of Europe.'"

"Disgusting!" commented Sir Humphrey. "The way one's private affairs get into the newspapers—"

Vassall glanced for himself at the paragraph and said nothing.

"That kind of thing blows over," said Petrina. "If, when everything is settled, you were to go abroad for a month or two—"

"I shall go to America," Sir Humphrey explained, as he sipped his tea. "That will give Emmy a chance to get used to the new conditions; and when I come back I shall be able to fall more easily into them, too."

"Perhaps you could come with us," Petrina sug-

gested. "We sail on the *Calabria* the first week in September."

"Even if I don't, you will be good to me when I get there, I hope?"

"Couldn't you come with us straight to Faneuil Hill?" Petrina asked. "I'm sure you'd enjoy it, even though there's no sport."

"Thanks," replied Sir Humphrey, and Petrina thought she detected an embarrassment in his air. "But I've already promised the Tyrells to spend September with them at Lenox."

"You'll like that," Petrina remarked, not taking her eyes from his. "And, by-the-way, I see you have a new picture of Gentian."

"Yes," he said, going to the mantel-piece and taking the photograph down. "It's good, isn't it?"

Petrina glanced significantly at Vassall.

They were still commenting on Miss Tyrell's portrait and pose when Sir Humphrey's man came in again.

"The young lady is 'ere, sir," he said. "Shall I ask her to come up?"

"Young lady?" stammered Sir Humphrey, reddening. "Not Miss—"

"Yes, sir. I told 'er you was engaged—very pertic'lar engaged, I said."

"Well, then?"

"She said she'd wait, sir. Lady Constance is to call for her in the carriage in 'alf an hour."

"Oh, then, it's not Miss—?"

"No, sir," the man cried, with horrified emphasis. "I 'ope, sir, you know as I'd 'a' had more tack than to announce before company any one who—"

Petrina laughed. Sir Humphrey breathed more freely.

"Show Miss de Bohun up," he ordered.

"Well, Polly," he cried, as Hippolyta entered. "This is a pleasant surprise."

The girl looked bewildered as she saw Vassall and Petrina.

"I thought you were alone," she began. "Otherwise I shouldn't have come."

"But your uncle and aunt, Polly, scarcely count."

"No, no," she stammered, confusedly. She stood in the middle of the room and looked helplessly from one to the other.

"Why, what's the matter?" Sir Humphrey inquired, anxiously. "Are you ill?"

"No, no," she repeated. "Not ill—only—"

"Only what, dear?" Petrina asked, rising and coming forward. "Can I help you?"

"No, no," Hippolyta murmured again, as though unconscious of what she said.

"Shall we go away?" Petrina questioned. "Would you like to see your father without your Uncle Harry and me?"

"No; it doesn't matter—now," she answered, still speaking dreamily. "I see," she added, turning towards Vassall, who sat with the blue-covered copy of the cheap social journal in his hand, "I see you've got one, too."

"What does this mean, Hippolyta?" Sir Humphrey cried, sternly, beginning to take alarm.

"Papa, Tristram sent me this," she burst out, drawing a second blue-covered paper from her pocket.

"This? This?" he blustered. "What do you mean by this?"

"That!" she said, promptly, pointing to the copy in Vassall's hand. "You know what it is. You've been reading it. You've been talking about it."

"My dear child," Sir Humphrey began, in a reasoning tone.

"Is it true?" she demanded.

"Is what true? Is it true that your mother has—?"

"No, not that. Is the rest of it true? Is it true that—?"

"My dear little girl," Vassall broke in, coming forward and taking her hand. "You can trust me, can't you?"

"I don't know, Uncle Harry," she replied, in a hard voice. "Until I know whether or not this is true—"

"Don't you know," Vassall continued, "how impossible it is for people in the position of your father and mother to keep their names out of the pages of the press?"

"Yes, I am aware of that. I've often seen their names there before, but not like this. Is it true?"

"Papers like this live by lies, dear," Petrina said, taking the girl's other hand.

She freed herself impatiently.

"Then is this a lie?" she insisted. "You needn't explain to me if it isn't true. I am ready to believe anything you tell me. Papa dear, will you answer me? What is the use of all this mystery?"

"How on earth did Tristram come by such a sheet as that?" the father demanded, angrily. "I shall punish him severely."

"It wasn't his fault, papa. A boy at his school gave it to him and pointed out the paragraph."

"It's perfectly indecent that boys of that age—" Sir Humphrey began again.

"Oh, there isn't anything they don't know, papa. They hear it at home. Little George Magnaville repeats to Tristram all the gossip that he listens to at his father's — Lord Yorkshire's, you know; and the Duke of Ambleside's son does the same. It really isn't

Tristram's fault, papa dear. But if you'll only say it isn't true I can write to assure him that you—"

"Upon my soul, things have reached a pretty pass when a girl like you—"

"Oh, I, papa! Don't think of me. If only it isn't true—"

"It's a scandal that a mere child of eighteen should catechise her father on a subject like this."

"I'm not a child, papa. I'm a woman. If I know all this it is because no one ever shielded me."

"I think, dearest," said Petrina, "that if you'll come away with me I can explain everything to you better than if we were not alone."

"I don't ask for explanations, Petrina. My question is one—"

"Which you have no right to put," Sir Humphrey burst out, furiously. "Have you no shame, Hippolyta?"

"Shame, father!" the girl cried, with flaming cheeks. "Do you talk to me of shame? Is it no shame that you and my mother live like strangers? Is it no shame that she is taking other men's money, while other women are taking yours? Is it no shame—?"

"Be quiet, Hippolyta," Vassall said in her ear. "You are saying more than you have a right to say."

"I know what I'm speaking of, Uncle Harry. But I didn't come here to talk of it. I came to ask a question, and no one will give me an answer."

"That a daughter should put such a question to her father," said Sir Humphrey, "is beyond all belief."

"You have only to say no, papa, and I will go away. Surely it is a simple thing. Is there such a person as this—this actress? Have you—?"

"Hippolyta, I forbid you to go on. I never dreamed that a child of mine should come to this."

"That's how the sins of the fathers are visited on the children," she returned.

"The fathers can answer for their own sins," Sir Humphrey asserted, trying to take an injured tone.

"But the children have to bear them," the girl declared.

"Bear?" he cried. "What have you ever had to bear? Haven't I given you a luxurious home?"

"Yes, father."

"And every worldly advantage?"

"Yes, father."

"And allowed you to have your own way?"

"Yes, father."

"Then what more—?"

"Oh, much more, papa! There's something better than all the things you've named; and we've never had it. We crave it. Tristram craves it. I crave it. Even little baby Humphrey knows he doesn't get it."

"Then I give it up," Sir Humphrey said, impatiently. "Run away, Hippolyta, and learn to be a sensible, obedient girl who doesn't meddle with what doesn't concern her."

"Doesn't concern?" she cried, taking a step nearer him, and holding out the blue-covered journal. "Do you mean that a story like this, in which my father's name is dragged in the mire, doesn't concern me? Pray, then, whom does it concern? Does it concern mamma? Does it concern Tristram? Does it concern you? Does it concern this lady — this charming young actress? Oh, father, you don't know what you're saying. I am your daughter. The foulness that bespatters you bespatters me. You may try to separate your life from mine, but I can never separate mine from yours. I bear your name. I carry the stamp of your features in my own."

"Hippolyta, dear," Petrina interrupted, "you are growing excited."

"Don't stop me, Petrina. I demand what I have a right to know. Once more, father—"

"What good will it do you to be told the truth?" Vassall asked, laying his hand on her arm. "Why not be advised by those—"

"I have a right to know, Uncle Harry. And if the truth is that all this is nothing but a lie—! Oh, it must be that! Say so, father. Say so, Petrina. Why do you keep me pleading and panting here? Don't you see that I'm breaking down? Father, I don't ask much. You know how Tristram loves you. You know how in his heart he thinks there is no one in the world like you. And I think so. We've been so proud of you, father, even when you and mother don't agree. Tell me, papa, tell me that it isn't true. Why don't you speak? Why doesn't some one speak? It's so easy to say. Just a word, and yet you stand there looking at me as if you were all dumb—"

"Dear, dear Hippolyta, come with me," Petrina cried, throwing her arms about the girl. "Come into the next room. I can tell you everything in a way that you will understand."

"No, no, Petrina. I'll go when papa says it isn't true. Papa! Papa! it *is* true! You're turning white. It *is* true. Uncle Harry, take me away. I want to go down into the street, to get into the air. No, I can't go just yet. Let me sit down. Is there a fan anywhere?"

She sank into a chair. For a minute she kept her self-control. Then, with face bowed into her hands, she burst into sobs.

But Sir Humphrey could hold out no longer. Whatever pure love was in his nature was for his "little

Polly," as he called her. Dropping on one knee beside her chair, he threw his arms about her.

"It isn't true. It isn't true," he murmured. "You can say so to Tristie. It isn't true."

"Was there ever a more useless lie?" Vassall whispered to Petrina. "Before many weeks are over she will know it's true."

"We must try to shield her from it," Petrina whispered in return. "We must take her out of England."

CHAPTER IX

"I THINK I had better go and see Emmy," Petrina said next morning. "I shall probably lunch with her. Do you mind?"

"I have some errands that will take me out," Vassall replied. "I'll drop you at Claridge's, and then go and do them. Are you dining anywhere? Or shall we meet here?"

"We can dine together, but I thought of going afterwards to Mrs. Poynter's party at Ambleside House. I half promised the Duchess to try and bring you, too. Won't you, Harry? Just for once, for her sake!"

"If you'd said for your sake—"

"I do say it—for my sake. Ever since yesterday afternoon at Humphrey's I have a dread of letting you out of my sight."

He was pleased and kissed her. Then they drove to Claridge's.

Later in the morning Vassall met his brother-in-law in Bond Street. Sir Humphrey looked tired and old.

"I say, old man," he said, taking Vassall's arm, "let's go and lunch together at Prince's. I don't want to go to a club. They've already begun to tell my story. It's wonderful how a little scandal makes one a target for every other sinner's scorn."

At table Sir Humphrey was out of spirits.

"I'd be awfully obliged if you and Petrina *would* take Polly out of England for a week or two," he replied, in answer to a suggestion from Vassall. "She's

never been to Paris, and the change of scene would divert her. I don't know how much she believed of what I told her yesterday afternoon, but when you had gone away she braced up a bit, and we parted friends. But, good Lord, what times we live in, when a man is called to book for his—his—his—"

"Yes, I understand," said Vassall.

"By a daughter of eighteen. It's the beastly prying press, that's what it is. There's no more privacy; there are no more children; precious soon, if the divorce mill grinds on, there will be no more wives."

"There will always be Miss Hetty Viennes."

"And may the devil take 'em. I've washed my hands of that lot. The hussy's got me into a pretty mess, when my own children hale me to their judgment-seat. There's Tristram, fifteen years old. How am I ever going to look him in the face again? I'm blowed if I don't think I could bring an action for damages against that blue-covered rag. I'll tell you what it is, Harry; as soon as this cursed business is over I'm going to hook it. I'm going to boil myself at some hole of a foreign bath, and then I'll cut over to America. I've already promised Lechmere to go with him to do a cure for a complaint I haven't got, and it's just to hide myself from Hippolyta and Tristram. Gad, if it was Emmy, it would be another thing. But that a man shouldn't be able to turn to the right or the left —especially to the left—without thinking of his own children, it's unnatural; it's inhuman; and I'm damned if I don't think it's hard."

Vassall went on with his lunch in silence.

"A pretty pair we shall make, Lechmere and I," Sir Humphrey began again, as he hastily swallowed his food. "Gad, it makes me laugh. Two worn-out grass-widowers, keeping each other company, while our wives

that used to be—but, by the Lord, Harry, look. Look over there. Well, speak of the devil! If it isn't our wives that used to be—Lechmere's and mine—forming a group on their side."

Vassall looked up hurriedly. Madame de Prony, tall and willowy like a girl, dressed simply in gray, was crossing the great room to a table in a corner. After her walked Lady de Bohun, brisk and smiling, nodding to friends as she passed them by. And then, at a little distance, came Petrina—slowly and gravely, bowing too, as she caught sight of acquaintances here and there.

"They haven't seen us," Sir Humphrey remarked, indifferently. "But I say, old fellow, what's up?" he inquired, as he looked at Vassall.

"Nothing, nothing."

"You're a bit white about the gills."

"It's nothing," Vassall repeated, with an effort to master himself. "A touch of indigestion, perhaps. I'll take a *fine champagne* with the coffee. I shall be all right in a minute.

"I don't think we need trouble those ladies," Sir Humphrey remarked when he had paid his bill. "Emmy knows I hate to have her seen with the de Prony. I'm not particular, Heaven knows, but I pause at Mrs. Richard Lechmere. By the way, they say, she's tremendously in debt, and that it isn't as easy as it used to be to find fools to pay. Her voice isn't keeping its promise, either. She's been singing out of tune the whole season. It's doubtful, even, whether she's taken on another year at Covent Garden, in spite of all the pull she's got and the fuss that's been made about her. And if you don't mind my saying it, Harry, old boy, I wouldn't let Petrina make a friend of a lady whose name—"

"Oh, Petrina's all right," Vassall said, testily, as he rose.

"Well, if I'd ever had as much control over my wife as you have over yours, she wouldn't be hobnobbing with Felicia. It isn't the thing—you may take my word for it—"

But Vassall was already out of hearing on his way towards the door.

The brothers-in-law parted in Piccadilly.

"Hope you'll be better soon," Sir Humphrey said as they shook hands. "If it's indigestion, let me advise you to take, about six o'clock to-morrow morning, a good, stiff glass of Hun—"

"Oh, it's nothing, Humphrey, thanks," said Vassall as he turned away.

He was glad to find himself alone. That Petrina should have disregarded his wishes on a point on which he felt so strongly wounded him to the quick. He scarcely knew how he ought to think or what attitude he ought to take.

Turning westward, he walked along Piccadilly to Hyde Park Corner. He took the direction aimlessly, moved only by the desire to calm by physical action the agitation of his mind and nerves. On he went through Knightsbridge, into the Park, across Kensington Palace Gardens, back again into Kensington High Street, through Earl's Court to Brompton Road, along St. George's Place to Constitution Hill, and then, skirting the grounds of Stafford House and Clarence House, into Pall Mall, and so to the Carlton House Hotel. He felt as if he could not walk far enough, nor fast enough, nor long enough.

When he reached home Petrina was already dressing for dinner. The meal, served in their own apartments, was a silent one. It was not until the carriage was

announced, and Petrina, cloaked for going out, stood fastening her gloves, that the matter which was in both their minds was touched upon. Vassall was determined not to speak of it till she did.

"Harry, before we go," she said, "I've something to say. I lunched with Madame de Prony to-day."

"Why do you tell me?" he asked, coldly.

"I didn't like her. I thought you might care to know. But since apparently you don't—"

"There is something that I do care for very much, Petrina."

Instantly she felt the touch of the whip. She held her head high, and her nostrils quivered, but she spoke in a tone of indifference.

"Really? Well, you can tell me some other time, because, I think, now we ought to go."

"I care," said Vassall, taking no notice of her words, "that before you next appear in public with a notorious and disreputable woman—"

"I don't think I like listening to things of that sort," she said, haughtily, moving towards the door.

"You shall listen to what I think right to say to you," he said, putting himself between the door and her. "You are my wife."

"Yes," she interposed, speaking very distinctly, "I am your wife for the time being. But if you insist on taking that tone to me—"

She shrugged her shoulders, and went on fastening her gloves. When the task was finished she raised her eyes to his.

"What's the matter?" she asked, tranquilly. "You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"I have," he said, with a composure equal to her own, "the ghost of a woman whom I thought living, but who is dead."

"Or who never lived, perhaps."

"You are right, Petrina. I think the woman I've thought I saw never did live."

"Would you mind taking my fan?" she said. "It's so difficult to carry it and to hold my dress."

He opened the door for her, and she passed out.

"Thanks," she said with a smile, as he followed her.

CHAPTER X

BEFORE the summer was over Lady de Bohun's divorce had been made absolute.

It had been managed quietly, and there had been comparatively little scandal. The fact that there was no defence, and that the other lady in the case was a "professional" person, negatived what is commonly called "sensation." The closest of all earthly ties was broken with an ease which seemed to both husband and wife incredible. They found it hard to realize that they were free.

When Sir Humphrey received the intelligence, he went home to his chambers, locked the door, threw himself face downwards on his bed, and sobbed. It was the first time he had done so since his father's death; but the strain of the past two months had unnerved him, and nineteen years of married life had meant more to him than he supposed. Then he arose, washed his face, recurled his mustache, put on a new suit from Poole's, and went out to begin his life all over again.

Lady de Bohun was at Orpington Park when the decision was made known to her. She took it with a hard little laugh, and then sat down to accept her invitations to the North. She hummed while she wrote, and wondered what Humphrey would say.

Petrina and Vassall had kept Hippolyta on the Continent. She saw no English papers, and heard no news but what was written her. In Tristram's scrawled

letters there was not a word of either father or mother. Before leaving England Vassall had gone down to Eton to see the boy at his school, and to explain the coming divorce with as much gentleness as he could assume. The little man accepted the fact with mingled tears and pluck, and promised to write nothing that would disturb his sister.

"It's mother's fault," he sobbed—"all the boys say so."

"The boys?"

"Yes; they talk about it. George Magnaville says that his mother says that my mother is going to marry red-faced old Bertie. If she does I'll never go home again. I shall feel no more responsibility for either her or father."

"You mustn't listen to such stuff," said Vassall; but he came away from Eton more thoughtful than he went there.

They were at Baden-Baden when a telegram came from Lady de Bohun, containing the one word, "Free."

"I think I had better tell her," said Petrina, and so she invited Hippolyta to walk.

"We've had a telegram from your mother to-day," she began, as they strolled by the murmuring Oos, under the trees of the Lichtenthaler Allée.

"And has it taken place?"

"What?" Petrina inquired, with a start of surprise.

"The divorce."

"Yes, dear; but—"

"Don't tell me any more about it, please, Petrina. Ask Uncle Harry not to speak of it. I knew it was coming, and," she went on, speaking very softly, "in spite of what papa said to comfort me in London, I know the reason why. There are things which admit of no mitigation, and this is one. I mean to bear it, remem-

bering that I am both my father's and my mother's child. Only if you and Uncle Harry want to help me there is a way."

"You know in advance that we will take it."

"It is in asking papa and mamma to allow me some day—not yet, but some day—to go into the convent."

A little later they returned to England, and went straight to Orpington Park. Tristram, home for the holidays, was at the station. The brother and sister met with some embarrassment. They spoke of their mother, but avoided their father's name.

"So you didn't go to Scotland, after all," Vassall remarked to his sister, as they sat about the tea-table in the drawing-room, just after their arrival.

"No," said Lady de Bohun, with a little pout. "I changed my mind and cancelled my acceptances. Scotland's so wet—"

"And a widow whose husband isn't dead," interposed Tristram, "always gets a damp welcome everywhere. George Magnaville's mother said that."

"If I'm in need of a husband she might spare me one of hers," Lady de Bohun rejoined, with spirit.

"I'm tired," said Hippolyta, putting down her untasted cup of tea. "I think I shall go to my room."

"You clear out, too," said Vassall to Tristram. "Go and see if the luggage has arrived."

Left to themselves, the three older ones talked with greater ease. Lady de Bohun was as brisk as ever, but Vassall and Petrina both detected a new, perhaps a forced, note in her cheerfulness. They observed, too, that her face was pinched and wan. Her delicate beauty seemed a little faded, and more than ever fragile.

"Have you seen anything of Humphrey?" she asked, when they had talked of many other things. She seemed almost embarrassed as she spoke.

"Harry saw him in Paris. I didn't," said Petrina.

"Where was it? In the street?"

"At the Pavillon d'Armenonville," Vassall replied. "He was lunching there. I was on my wheel in the Bois, and had stopped for a brandy-and-soda."

"Was he alone?"

"He seemed very well."

"Was he alone?" she insisted. "Oh, you needn't be afraid to tell me. It's nothing to me—now."

"He wasn't alone," Vassall said, with an attempt at speaking carelessly. "I think I'll just go up and try to get some of the dust off."

As he left the room Lady de Bohun laughed—but there was a nervousness in her mirth which did not escape Petrina's ear.

"I wish you had seen him," she said, when her brother had gone out. "Harry is so unobservant and so—uncommunicative. Whom was Humphrey with? Harry must have told you."

"He didn't," Petrina declared. "I never knew till now that there was anybody with him."

"That's the way these men hang together. You can't trust one of them. For anything you know Harry was lunching with them. He may even have been with some one else. Why aren't you a little more suspicious, Petrina dear?"

Petrina said nothing. Her sister-in-law sat a few moments looking meditatively at the floor.

"Well, it's nothing to me what Humphrey does," she said again. "He may lunch with all the ladies of the Vaudeville or the Gymnase for aught I care. Do you know if he's still abroad?"

"Why, he's gone to America."

"Gone?—What?" Lady de Bohun cried, leaning forward in surprise.

"Didn't you know? He was on his way to Cherbourg when Harry met him."

"Well, upon my word! I think that at least he might have written."

"He did write—to Hippolyta."

"But I suppose I have some claim."

"Well, Emmy, you know that the claim you had—"

"Don't talk to me about that, Petrina. I know quite well what I've done; and as long as Humphrey keeps within a certain distance, where I can hear about him and know what he's doing, I'm resigned. I accept the inevitable. But—"

"Resigned? Accept? Inevitable? How well you choose your words."

"But when it comes to going to America—to the other side of the world, I do think!—Well," she cried, jumping up and beginning to move about the room, "as I said before, it's nothing to me, nothing whatever. He might go to Australia, he might go to Fiji, wherever that is, and I shouldn't give him a thought. Of course I have to remember that he's the children's father. You can't expect me to forget that. But as to anything else, he's as dead to me as if he were the hero of one of last year's novels—deader. I don't want to be told where he goes, the Lord knows. But I should think his own feeling, his natural courtesy—and he was always polite, now wasn't he?"

"Always," Petrina interjected.

"That's one thing I liked about him, even at the worst of times. Well," she exclaimed in another tone, throwing herself into a chair, "let him go. I never asked him a question as to what he meant to do, and I never shall. Did he tell Harry what he was going to do when he got there?"

"Harry understood that he was going to Lenox, to the Tyrells."

"And 'may good words go with his name'! If he had written to me—even the least little line—I shouldn't feel so indifferent about him as I do now. Now I am absolutely, pitilessly indifferent. You see it, don't you? It's curious how one can accept the big wrongs of life and yet have all the love crushed out of one by the little ones. Well, well, well! It takes every kind of people to make a world; but if anybody had told me that Humphrey de Bohun would have gone to America, without a word to his wife—"

"His—?"

"Wife, I say, Petrina. I was his wife. I suppose that in a certain sense I am so still."

Lady de Bohun sat up straight in her chair, and in her air there was something like a challenge.

Petrina smiled, but seemed disinclined to enter on the subject.

"I'll go to my room now, Emmy dear," she said, rising. "I suppose dinner, as usual, is at eight."

The evening, contrary to expectation, was a cheerful one. For the first time in anybody's memory Lady de Bohun seemed glad to have her children near her. In a rather timid way she clung to them. She insisted that Tristram should stay up and dine with them; and, when dinner was over, she kept Hippolyta beside her on the sofa. She talked brightly; but in her vivacity there was that persistent note of something queer and new which Petrina had noticed in the afternoon.

Vassall, too, spoke of it, when he and his wife were in their apartments.

"I wonder if she isn't a little lonely?" he said.

But Petrina made no reply. She closed the door

between her room and his, and began to think along new lines. Presently Emmy's tap was heard.

"Come in, dear," Petrina said.

"Where's Harry?" Lady de Bohun asked, showing her head through the half-open door.

"In his own room. He won't be here again to-night. You needn't be afraid. Come in."

Lady de Bohun entered, slipping into an arm-chair by the open window.

"I've been in looking at baby," she said. "He's a dear little boy. I don't think I ever noticed before how much he's like his father. I'm glad we've called him Humphrey. I wanted something else at the time, but now— Well," she sighed, "I suppose we shall never have another."

"Under the circumstances, I should hope not."

"You're so unfeeling, Petrina. I've always noticed that you weren't in the least maternal."

There were several replies hovering on Petrina's lips, but she went on brushing her hair in silence.

"Didn't it ever strike you," Lady de Bohun asked, after a long pause, "that Gentian Tyrell was a perfect little schemer?"

"Rather," Petrina admitted. "Why do you ask?"

"Because when she was here I thought her rather silly about Humphrey. It was nothing to me—then, but—"

"But it is now?"

"Oh, dear, no! Less than ever. But it seems to me rather queer that the moment I give Humphrey a little rope—"

"A great deal of rope, I should say."

"That he should go straight to stay with them. Now, doesn't it seem so to you?"

"I can hardly say that it does, Emmy. Poor Hum-

phrey had to hide his vanquished head somewhere. Why not at Lenox, where he knows people, as well as in Sweden or in Spain, where he doesn't?"

"True, dear, but all the same—"

Lady de Bohun spoke slowly, and seemed to be reflecting.

"All the same," she said again, after a slight pause, "I wish, when you go back, you'd try to lure him up to Faneuil Hill. I'm sure he'd enjoy himself ever so much more there; and he'd be—well, I hesitate for a word—he'd be—safer."

"What do you mean by safer, Emmy? Safer from what?"

"I don't know that I can quite explain myself—" Lady de Bohun began.

"Do you see much of Major Bertie?" Petrina asked, in a careless tone, as though there were no secondary meaning to the question.

"Not so very much. He comes over now and then, but—"

"But you are not yet decided?"

"I can see Tristram doesn't like him, and of course that weighs with me. Then, too—don't you think it a little, just a little, soon for me to receive attentions?"

"But a divorce isn't like a widowhood, you know, dear. You don't wear mourning, or even stay away from parties. I've known women to be divorced in the morning and married again in the afternoon. You see, it isn't as if there was a funeral or anything to wait for."

"True, true," Lady de Bohun admitted, thoughtfully, "but still it seems to me that marriage should be preceded by certain attentions—"

"Why, you were getting them all last winter. You told me so."

"Ah yes. But the attentions one gets as a married

woman are so different from those one receives as a—"

"*Divorcée,*" said Petrina, looking at herself in a hand-mirror.

"Oh, don't call me that, dear," Lady de Bohun pleaded. "I hate the word."

She sprang up and began moving restlessly about. Petrina went on twisting up her hair. Lady de Bohun came and stood looking down at her.

"How nice your hair is," she said, "so fine and yet so much of it."

"Do you think so?" Petrina said, indifferently, as she searched on the dressing-table for a hair pin.

"Do I think so? Yes, I think so," Lady de Bohun cried, in a tone half of mockery, half of exasperation, and with a suggestion of nervousness and tears. Petrina glanced up quickly. They looked each other in the eyes.

"How queer you seem, Emmy, dear!"

"Queer? Of course I'm queer," she cried, with a half-sob.

It was only an instant. She recovered herself with a slightly hysterical laugh.

"Do you know what I should like?" she asked, dashing aside the tears. "You'd never guess, not if you guessed till you fell asleep. I should like to see mother. It's the first time for years and years that I've wanted it. I wish she were here. I wish I were there. I wish I could snuggle myself up to her in her long chair, as I used to do when I was a little girl, and have her comfort me. Latterly, ever since Humphrey went, it's all come back to me. Oh, Petrina, why are you so dense? Why is Harry so stupid? You've invited Hippolyta to Amer-

ica. Why don't you invite me? Don't you see I'm longing to go?"

"Then come, dear," said Petrina.

As she spoke she rose, and with the soft smile of the woman who comprehends folded Emilia in her strong young arms.

Part III

CHAPTER I

"How can two walk together except they be agreed?"

This was the problem Vassall and Petrina were now consciously trying to work out. Up to their return to America they had been able to postpone its solution. But, once there, they had begun immediately to walk apart.

Three days after their arrival Petrina found herself alone at the breakfast-table in the bow-fronted embrasure of the dining-room at Faneuil Hill.

Vassall had gone to Boston by an early train. He could not stay away any longer from "the office." For the rest of the autumn he would be at Faneuil Hill from Saturday afternoon to Monday morning every week. The remainder of the time he would be at work.

He had breakfasted alone, and had just driven away. As Petrina, looking absently over the panorama of wooded New Hampshire hills, sat waiting for her mother to come down, she avowed her strong disapproval of his action.

"This is the parting of the ways," she thought. "Either he must walk with me, or I shall go on alone."

They had not quarrelled: they had only differed courteously. Since leaving England there had been several occasions on which Vassall had lost his temper, but Petrina had had at command the soft answer which soothes for the moment but leaves a sting behind.

"I haven't asked mamma to have the Boston house opened," she said, as she leaned with her husband on

the rail of the *Calabria,* idly watching the Irish passengers come on at Queenstown. Lady de Bohun and Hippolyta, to whom the scene was more novel, were chaffering for laces and black bog-wood toys with the Irishwomen on the tender.

"You're quite right," said Vassall. "Our own house will be ready, though my mother will be at Newport with the Peabody Pepperells."

"I thought," Petrina went on, ignoring his words, "that we could go straight from New York to Faneuil Hill by way of Keene. Then, when we come back to Boston, all the work on the music-room will be finished."

Vassall started.

"You've gone on with that, after all?" he asked, with brows knitted. "I understood that you had given the idea up."

"I knew you'd like it when you saw it. We could hardly do without it, if we are going to have many people at a time. Besides, it will do not only for music but for dancing."

"But, Petrina, dearest," Vassall protested, "surely my house is your home."

"And surely mine is yours," she responded with a smile.

Hitherto they had only skirted this subject. When it had come up they had avoided it—each waiting for the moment when his or her will could be imposed, not by force, but by diplomatic adroitness. The moment had come when the question must be discussed.

"I shall not live in Cambridge," was the burden of what Petrina had to say.

"The Vassalls have never lived elsewhere," was the husband's argument.

If either yielded it was he. That is, he agreed to go to Faneuil Hill, and afterwards for a time to Beacon

Street. Beyond that there was no decision. The subject was, indeed, almost forgotten when Petrina perceived that Vassall meant to leave her at Faneuil Hill that he might return to work. Work was a word which for her had little meaning. Her father had had no profession, and it had never occurred to her that Vassall would remain in his when there was no longer a financial reason for his doing so.

"I have my living to earn," he repeated; but, when there was so much money, the argument seemed to her a foolish one. It was not, in her opinion, a question of pride, but of utility. There were so many other things for him to do, things which she considered essential, and for which partially she had married him.

Therefore, as she sat waiting for her stepmother, she tapped nervously on the table, while strange thoughts passed through her mind.

"It's just as it used to be," Mrs. Faneuil said, when she had taken her place and began to pour the coffee. "When I see you opposite me I can scarcely realize that you've been married."

"Marriage does make less impression than I thought it would," Petrina said, as she took her cup.

"Ah? You think that? It isn't the usual experience."

"I differ from you there, mamma. I know so many people who've been married and unmarried, and the fact has passed over them as easily as a trip abroad."

"Marriage enlarges the ideas but leaves one's self unchanged? Is that it?"

"It leaves one's self more one's self than ever. The close contact with another life reveals the fact that there is a point beyond which one cannot go. I used to think that perhaps there might be a certain breaking-down of boundary-lines—a community of life, as Harry says.

I never was very sure of it, but now I know that human existences are like islands in the ocean; they may lie near together, but they never merge."

"I call that rather cynical in a wife."

"I don't quite see how a wife can be otherwise than cynical. All the married women I know are spending their time trying to piece together shattered hopes. It's rather pathetic, I think, and such a waste of energy."

"If I didn't know you were happy—" Mrs. Faneuil began, with a shade of anxiety in her tone.

"Oh, I have never regretted my marriage, as an—experiment" Petrina hastened to say, while she buttered her toast.

"As a what, dear? Did you say an experiment?"

"Yes, mamma. Everything is experimental now-a-days, and marriage most of all.

"I'm not sure that I follow you."

"Hasn't it struck you that we are all more cautious and tentative than people used to be. Among most women, and especially New England women, there is a reluctance to commit one's self."

"But in marriage one does commit one's self."

"Up to a certain point; but not to a point from which one cannot go on to something else. Take Emmy de Bohun as an example. She is quite modern. She is held by no scruples, prejudices, or preconceptions. She treats marriage, therefore, in an experimental way. She tries first the ordinary condition of conjugal co-operation—the one I'm trying now—and she meets with indifferently good results. Then she experiments with what is commonly called separation, with results still unsatisfactory. Then she takes a step forward and tries divorce, with results as yet to be ascertained. But if I don't mistake her she means to go on to a fourth test still—that of remarriage with the man she has

put away. Her experiments have shown her that she loves him more than she supposed. If you think that what I call the stage of conjugal co-operation is the final one—"

"Final, except for widowhood. I did think that—more or less."

"Then that only shows your moral progress to have been arrested. I'm surprised at that in you, mamma."

"I often wonder," said Mrs. Faneuil, thoughtfully, "how much of what you say is theoretical and how much practical."

"That is, whether or not I have the courage of my convictions. I think you may take it that I have. But I see that that isn't quite your thought. You want to know if my married experience—"

"No, dear, I don't. No one has a right to ask—"

"Perhaps not. But one has a right to tell. And I like to talk to you, mamma. You're so open-minded. You can be sympathetic without flattering; and you can receive confidences without giving advice. Now, Emmy can't be the one, and Harry can't do the other. So it's a genuine relief to be face to face with you."

"If I can't flatter, you can," said Mrs. Faneuil, looking pleased. "But one day, when you know your husband better—that takes time, you know—you'll find that he is the best confidant."

"Oh, I'm perfectly at home with Harry. Only he has so many notions that I find conversation with him dangerous. Latterly when we've been alone I've felt all the time as if I were out of doors on the Fourth of July. I'm always nervous lest something will explode."

"Have you ever asked yourself how much of that is his fault—?"

"And how much is mine? Yes, mother dear, I have.

And I am bound to confess that it's mostly his. You see, he has so many ideas of his own—"

"And you have none?"

"But I have a right to mine. He knew them before he married me; while I didn't know one-half of his. I'm not unreasonable, mother dear; but could I go and live in that old, mouldering house in Cambridge? Can you fancy me there? And then all this folly about earning his own living! If I hadn't had enough for two I shouldn't have taken him. And I want him for so many other things. At this very minute I should be writing to Saltonstall Browne and Tremont Somerset and two or three other men to come and see us between now and November. But I can't do it if Harry isn't to be here."

"But we've had men before."

"Yes, but rather tamely. When there isn't a man belonging to a house other men fight shy of it. I've always noticed that, and it was one of the reasons why I married. But if he's going to shut himself up in a musty office in State Street, I shall have had my trouble for my pains. 'The Office' he calls it, as if it were a sort of god he served."

"Most women like their husbands to have some occupation."

"I have plenty for mine; but he won't do it."

"You thought you were marrying a lay-figure, but you see you have found a man."

"I thought I was marrying a supplementary self; but I have found—"

"Don't tell me what you've found, dear. You will know that better five years hence."

"Five what, mamma? Do you fancy I am going to wait five years? It would become a tragedy."

"But marriage isn't a comedy, my dear."

"Oh, yes, it is; a high comedy; a comedy of states of mind."

"I should rather say a comedy of passions."

"It is that, too. Of course where there has been love there must have been passion."

"I'm glad you've mentioned that," said Mrs. Faneuil, with a smile. "I observe that love is always the last word with you when you speak of marriage, but perhaps that's because it's the first thought."

"That isn't so," said Petrina, shaking her head. "Love in a life such as I mean to lead is like the silver thread in a brocade. It adds a touch of beauty, but you can have the brocade without it. And, on the whole, it seems to me that the less love, the greater the happiness. If that seems crude, I would put it thus: that the more lightly love is introduced into life the more prospect there is of its lasting. I'm not nearly so inclined to think it an important thing as I was a year ago. On one side or the other it is sure to wear out, and then—?"

"Yes? And then?"

"Well, I was thinking of Mr. Lechmere. We've been seeing a good deal of him."

"Tell me about him. He has always interested me."

"There's an instance where the love has endured on one side and not on the other. And the result, of course, is misery."

"Poor fellow! Doesn't he get over it?"

"Yes—in a way. But one divines that it is always there."

"And she? You met her, I think, you said?"

"A horrid creature. She is lovely to look at, especially from a distance; but in reality she is both common and commonplace. One can't help wondering how a man like Mr. Lechmere could ever have cared for her."

"When you are my age that sort of thing will be more of a puzzle and less of a surprise. I haven't known many cases of a grand passion; but those I have known were roused by what seemed to me the most unworthy objects. Love is a great mystery."

"Do you really think so, mother dear?" said Petrina, rising and moving languidly towards the veranda. "I have been through it, and am now almost out at the other side, and it has seemed to me such a slight thing —a comedy, as we said just now—"

"In passions."

"In passions, if you will, but still a comedy with a little to feel, and a little to laugh at, and much to think about, and a very few tears."

"I wonder if you *have* loved?" Mrs. Faneuil asked, looking up at her.

"Most certainly I have; and I do. But—"

"Then the end is not yet."

"No, not yet. I admit that. But I ask myself, can it be that it is not far off?"

Petrina went out on the veranda, and Mrs. Faneuil came and stood beside her.

For a while they gazed without speaking over the huge, restful flank of Mount Majestic. Suddenly Petrina turned towards her stepmother.

"I think there is something the matter with you," she said, half anxiously.

"Nonsense, my dear child."

"Is it because you're going to live in an apartment, mamma? You know I'd a thousand times rather keep you with me."

"I prefer to do as I'm doing. I shall be only across the street, and so can see as much or as little of you as I choose."

"Then what is it? You seem thin and white. You're

a little depressed, too. I've noticed it ever since I returned."

"It isn't anything, dear, to worry you. It's only that I'm growing older and gradually travelling over there."

She pointed to the westward, but Petrina slipped her arm about her stepmother's waist.

"No, no, you mustn't," she murmured with affection. "I couldn't do without you."

Mrs. Faneuil smiled, but turned silently away, wondering how long she could conceal the fact that the physicians had already passed their sentence of death upon her.

CHAPTER II

WHEN Petrina returned to Boston Lady de Bohun's visit gave her a natural excuse for much entertaining. The new music-room was not quite ready, so she gave lunches and dinners and afternoon parties. Something of her ambition was realized; for other hostesses stepped aside to let her take the lead. Loving her Boston with a patriot's love, she believed intensely in its greatness. She was not narrow, she was only enthusiastic. She liked the ease of London; the brilliancy of Paris; the dignity of Vienna; the strenuousness of New York; the quaintness of Philadelphia; the indolence of Baltimore. But all that was best in all these qualities she found in Boston, with added capabilities New England born. Petrina's limitations were in things spiritual; her ignorance was in things moral; her strength lay in the human side of things, in the graceful, the tactful, the pleasing, the merely passing, and what some would call the vain. Hers was, therefore, not a great ambition; but then her nature was not great. In the Boston of her birth and love she saw possibilities of power wedded to charm, of intelligence going with gayety. Of these social forces she wanted to be the Lady Holland or the Madame de Staël. She began her campaign at once by throwing the young and the old together, by mingling the married with the single, by putting members of the "hunting set" side by side at table with literary people who were not often asked to dinner anywhere. She expended much thought

in seeking secret sympathies between those who had been strangers. She wanted to enlarge society and so to enrich individual lives. It was not much to do in this needy world, but perhaps it was better than to have no aim at all.

She made some mistakes; she even created enemies. She encountered the coldness of old, well-established families, whose entertaining was confined to those who had some claims of kinship. She gave offence to more than one young miss in having her taken out to dinner by a married man. Ladies and gentlemen in their first season felt themselves humiliated in being asked to sit at the same board with those who were in their fifth or sixth—or who had ceased to keep the count. Now and then it was evident that some one who found himself "out of his set" was as much at a loss as an ant transferred from his own ant-hill to another. All these were little difficulties which Petrina had the time and patience and tact to overcome. By Christmas she felt herself beginning to succeed; and when, with the New Year, she should have her music-room, she meant to begin operations on a larger scale.

And yet her heart sometimes misgave her. Triumph abroad was dearly purchased by struggle at home. On all her efforts Vassall looked with a disapproval which he cared less and less to conceal. The manner of life was utterly different from any he had meant that they should lead. From his point of view it was frivolous, conspicuous, and expensive. It was worse than that; it was worldly, pretentious, and unworthy of people with serious views of life. His position obliged him to play the host to a troop of strangers whom he hated to see come within his doors. And yet they were not his doors! The fact that all this hospitality was given with money to which he had but a secondary claim, and

in a house of which he was the master only by marriage, was one which he found galling. The mere expenditure was, to his thrifty New England mind, objectionable; the unconcealed effects of wealth, which his mother called "display," were more objectionable still; while the lack of privacy, the sense of never having the house to themselves, was most objectionable of all. When he came home tired from the office, there was not a half-hour's repose before dressing to go with Petrina to dine at some one's house, or to make himself agreeable to those who were coming to dine at theirs.

"Are we never going to have an evening alone together again?" he asked, with a weary smile, when Petrina consulted him as to whom to ask with his cousins, the Peabody Pepperells.

"What for?" she said, not lifting her eyes from her note-book.

"To see each other, to talk. I thought, too," he suggested, almost timidly, "that by-and-by we might take up some reading aloud."

"Oh, Harry," she cried, in the voice of a woman who has been wounded, "not that!" Then she went on, in another tone. "Don't you think we might include the Ripley Brownes? They've asked us twice, and we've never invited them at all. I shall not have the daughter, though; she uses such profane language."

"She's heartless," Vassall thought, as he went out.

"He's more dampening to the spirits than rain to gunpowder," she commented, as she jotted down names in her note-book.

"I think of asking a few people to inaugurate the music-room on New Year's night," she said to him, just before Christmas.

"It's a Sunday night," he objected.

"People don't mind that, you know."

"But I do."

"Oh no, you don't, Harry. Haven't we talked over all that before? Do, for once, be a little cheerful, and let me have things my own way. Besides, I shall ask the merest few—only the musical ones—to drop in and hear Pottelewiski play."

"I am very likely to be away, you know," Vassall objected again.

"That won't matter," she said, sweetly. "But where are you going?"

"I leave for Chicago on the twenty-sixth to attend that conference on Prison Reform. I can hardly be back before Monday at the earliest."

"I am sorry for that," said Petrina. "But then you won't have any of the responsibility of hearing music on a Sunday night."

Secretly relieved at her husband's departure, Petrina felt herself free for a ceremony on a larger scale than that intimated in the phrase "a few people." She consulted Lady de Bohun, who, to Mrs. Vassall's dismay, promised her aid. To Pottelewiski they added Mademoiselle Chosette, whose songs were of the school of Mademoiselle Yvette Guilbert, while a third attraction was to be La Madrilena, who would give examples of the saltatory art of Spain. It was to be nothing, Petrina said, as she scattered her verbal invitations everywhere; "just a few people," most informally, coming in any kind of costume they chose. On a Sunday night one was naturally Bohemian, and evening dress was not at all *de rigueur*.

"Just a few people—only a few more than I intended at first," Petrina explained to Vassall, when, by dint of hurrying, he arrived late on Sunday afternoon. At the distance of Chicago he thought more tenderly of Petrina's way of life, and if she really needed him for

the reception of "a few people," he would sacrifice a day of the conference to return in time.

The evening was a distinct success, the sort of success to be talked about in clubs and to awaken scandalized murmurs in conservative families who had had long-standing ties with the Faneuils. It was a success to bring Mrs. Harry Vassall's name in large print into the papers, and to make every messenger boy and milliner's girl turn to look after her as they passed her in the street. Private events form public topics in America, as they do not in the less *naïf* older world, and the reports carried out by Petrina's guests were of a kind which the American press finds excellent "copy."

From his absence, the longest since their marriage, Vassall had returned with his heart full of love. As the invited poured in till the "few" became fifty and the fifty a hundred and the hundred two hundred and more, he received them courteously, concealing his surprise. He thanked Pottelewiski, whose playing he disliked, with as much effusion as he could command, and did not stand aghast until Mademoiselle Chosette, a whimsically featured, red-haired French girl, badly dressed in green, stood up by the piano, and, in a hoarse voice, but with distinct enunciation, sang of the various methods in which a young woman may address a gentleman.

The air was pretty and rather plaintive; the French girl's manner was touchingly modest, as she stood with hands folded and eyes downcast.

The applause was rapid and loud.

"Capital!" cried Saltonstall Browne.

"There's art for you!" called young Peabody Pepperell.

"*Bis! bis!*" shouted Quincy Brattle, who spent most of his time in Paris.

"What impudence!" Mrs. Bowdoin Somerset declared laughingly to Vassall, as she tapped him on the arm with her fan. "To think that you of all men should ask us to come and listen to the like of that! And you know you cried 'Shame' on *my* Sunday-night receptions, just because we had cheese and beer. But Sainte Nitouche is always the worst. How catching that little refrain is, '*Dites, donc, monsieur! Dites, donc, monsieur!*'"

"*Dites, donc, monsieur! Dites, donc, monsieur!*" people were humming all round him as Mrs. Bowdoin Somerset turned away. But Vassall smiled and talked with every one. None, he said, should know that what Petrina did was not approved by him.

But when La Madrilena had danced, and Chosette had sung once more, and Pottelewiski had scratched and scrambled again up and down the key-board, and the guests had eaten and drunk and departed, and Emmy, before leaving for Cambridge, had kissed Petrina and declared that she didn't know when she had spent such a pleasant Sunday night, Vassall went into the library and flung himself wearily into one of the large leathern chairs.

"Well, what did you think of it?" Petrina asked, as she came in and found him there. Her cheek was flushed and her eye flashing with pleasure and excitement.

"I thought it was an outrage," he muttered in a low voice.

"You said—?"

Petrina seated herself with dignity. She felt the approach of another moment in which she should be obliged to hold her own.

"I said, an outrage," he repeated, speaking more firmly. "It was an outrage on decency and morality.

It was an outrage on good manners and good taste. It was an outrage on your guests; it was most of all an outrage on me."

"When I asked you your opinion," she said, in a voice as quiet as his own, "I forgot for the moment that you have lost the habit of speaking to me as a man should speak to his wife. I shall remember it in future. Good-night."

They both rose, and he confronted her.

"Don't you think we ought to have some explanation?" he asked. His question sounded like a threat.

"Of what?"

"Of the way we live. Of the way we are going to live."

"I don't see the necessity," she said, resting her arm on the mantel-piece. "You are free to live in any way you choose. I used to want you to live in mine. Now—"

"Now you don't care any longer."

"Rather I do care," she corrected. "I care that you shall live as little in my way as possible."

"Do you mean—apart?"

"Apart or together is a matter of indifference to me so long as—"

"So long as what?"

"You see you make yourself so odious to me. How can you expect me to—"

"I ask you plainly, Petrina, do you wish me to live apart from you?"

"It isn't for me to answer that question, Harry. You can do entirely as you please. So long as you choose to live in this house—"

"I shall have to rule it," he interrupted. "So long as I choose to live in this house I can allow no such exhibitions as those with which we have been entertained to-night."

"That is a subject which I suppose it would be useless for us to discuss," she remarked, in the same quiet voice. "But I think I may say without being ungenerous that it is only fair that one thing should be remembered."

"And that thing is—?"

"That in this house I am mistress."

"But I master."

She raised her eyebrows, but did not speak.

"So long as I have the honor of being your husband," he continued, "I am the head of this house or any other in which we live. I am the first. You are the second. I lead. You follow. I—"

"You may spare me any further eloquence, Harry. I know of no such theory of marriage as that, and shall not now begin to learn. But I should like to ask a question. Why did you come back this afternoon?—so soon?"

"Because I loved you, and the time seemed long to be away."

"It was a mistake," she said. "And I would beg—"

"I am waiting, Petrina."

"I scarcely know how to put it, in order to say it gently. I would beg for your sake as much as for my own," she went on very slowly, "that when next you go away it may be—to stay away."

There was a long minute of silent tension. He looked at her, but her face was turned from his.

"Would you kindly ring the bell?" she said at last. "I want my maid here."

Hot words were burning on Vassall's tongue; but he had learned to take his cue from her. Whatever happened they must not quarrel. They must keep their passions within the limits of comedy. They could express themselves with force, but there must be no recrimination.

He rang the bell.

"Is there anything more I can do for you?" he asked.

"No, thank you, Harry."

"Then shall we say Good-night?"

"Yes, if you like. Good-night."

She offered him her cheek. He kissed her and turned from her.

"This is the end," he said to himself as he went out. "I shall go away in the morning."

CHAPTER III

BUT in the morning Petrina had repented of her words. She waked early and listened to hear her husband stirring in the adjoining room. She meant to be very gracious to him when he came in. He had been unkind to her; he was making her unhappy with his Puritan narrow-mindedness and unsocial ways; but she would forgive him. So she propped herself up with pillows and waited for him with a smile.

When he entered his face was gray and grave. There were dark rings under his eyes, and he looked tired.

"He has been thinking about it," she said to herself; "but I can cheer him."

He had been thinking; but Petrina did not know how deeply.

"I've wounded him," she thought again, "but I can heal him."

He had been wounded; but Petrina did not know how fatally.

On going to his room he had put out the light, and then in the darkness had made what seemed to him the necessary plans. If he would save his marriage from resulting like that of Humphrey de Bohun, he himself must stand at the helm of their life and keep it in its course. He blamed himself for having allowed Petrina too much of her own way. She was young and rich, he said; it was not strange, therefore, that she should love pleasure and be led astray by fashion. It was his place to see that she was guided rightly. One

thing above all was certain—he would not remain in a position from which she could ask him to go. If they were to have any life together it should be on his ground, and never again on hers.

"Come in," she called, when she heard him knock. "Don't be shocked at me for not being up. I'm very lazy."

She held her right hand towards him with a smile. He kissed it coldly, and withdrew to a little distance.

"How tired you look!" she remarked. "Haven't you slept well?"

"Not very well."

"That's because you went to bed in a bad temper. Amiable people always sleep. No, no; don't raise that curtain," she cried, as he walked towards a window. "I'm not ready yet for the fierce light that beats upon a throne."

"I want to say something before I go out," he said, coming back towards the bed again.

"Then come and say it here. Sit down on the side of the bed. There; now we can talk."

She knew he was going to apologize, and so was prepared to pardon. As he looked at her his courage almost failed him, but he nerved himself to go on.

"I want to say something before I go out," he repeated.

"Say on," she consented, letting her hand rest on his.

"You asked me last night to stay away when next I go away."

"Surely you aren't going to take that to heart, Harry dear?"

There was something frightened in her tone, though she continued to smile at him.

"Could I do otherwise than take it to heart? Words



A Vitagraph Production. ***Let Not Man Put Asunder.***

PETRINA DINES WITH FELICIA IN SPITE OF THE PROTEST OF HER HUSBAND, HARRY VASSALL.

like that, dearest, can never be forgotten or explained away."

"But you know I didn't mean them."

"I think you did for the moment, though now you may be willing to take them back and let me stay."

"I *am* willing, Harry."

"Thank you, dear."

"I want you to stay."

"That's because you are patient with me. But you know a moment may come when the words which are now withdrawn may be repeated."

"If so we can talk about it then. We can wait—"

"No, Petrina. That is precisely what we cannot do. I, at least, cannot permit it to be possible that such words should be said again."

"You're very disagreeable," she complained, withdrawing her hand. "I don't know what you mean. You made me angry last night, and so I spoke. If you would only try to please me more you would not bring such things upon yourself. As it is, I am willing to overlook your attitude of hostility to me, and let the past be past. We can begin again."

"Exactly, Petrina. We must begin again, but under other conditions and on other grounds."

"It isn't the grounds and conditions that need to be changed, Harry dear; it's you. If you wouldn't always be to me what water is to fire—"

"I didn't come to discuss, Petrina, my darling," he said, very gently. "I came to tell you my plans. The time is past for talking. I must act."

"Go on. I am listening."

"I have decided that we had better leave this house and go to mine. That is where we belong and where we shall both be in our proper places."

"You know my feeling about that."

"Yes, and I have considered it. I see nothing to be gained by doing so any longer. The life I have to lead is not consistent with the noise and show and waste of time of that which we've been leading."

"You have indicated it sufficiently by your manners."

"You're very young, Petrina, and I shouldn't be doing my duty towards you if I didn't show you that you are making mistakes. You will thank me when you are older—"

"If you are working for that," she said, with a nervous laugh, "I beg you to spare your pains."

"For taking you out of a life," he went on, steadily, "which pursues a useless end by foolish means, and with which you yourself must become dissatisfied. Therefore I intend to live in Cambridge."

"And may I ask when? Or is it enough for me to wait until you give the word to go?"

"At once; to-day. When I leave the office this afternoon, I shall join you there."

"But it isn't possible."

"Our rooms are ready. The house is ours. You have nothing to do but give your maid the necessary orders."

"It isn't possible, Harry," she repeated, in a tone of consternation. "You must be crazy to think of it at all."

"Nothing is possible but that."

"What would Mrs. Vassall say to have us descend on her like that, with Emmy and Hippolyta already there?"

"My mother is always prepared for us. She is only waiting. She knows, too, that when you come there, it will be as mistress."

"I may go some time—for a week or two. I never said I wouldn't do that."

"We must go to-day. We have nowhere else to go."

"Why, what do you mean? Isn't this house our home?"

"Yours, perhaps, dear, but not mine. After what you asked me to do last night, it can never be mine again."

"But I've already told you that I didn't mean—"

"You can't take back such words, however much you may regret them. I may see that they were spoken hastily, but my own self-respect compels me to act upon them. I can't come back here again, dear. We must go to Cambridge."

"You're not only unreasonable, but cruel, Harry."

"It's the cruelty of circumstances. It isn't mine."

"You combine the folly of a child with the brutality of a man."

"We must go to Cambridge," he repeated, doggedly.

"You subject me to gratuitous indignity."

"It is useless to go on talking, dear. I've told you my wishes. I have no more to say."

"Then I have," she cried, with energy. "But it is only this—that I shall not go."

"I should advise you to reflect upon that," he said, rising and indicating that he meant to depart. "Your not doing so would be very grave."

When he had gone, Petrina buried her face in the pillows and burst into tears. She felt herself at once ill-treated and to blame. She regretted her words of the previous night, but it was monstrous on his part not to let her take them back.

It was, in fact, so monstrous that she found it impossible to believe that he meant it. She had no realization of the degree to which she had wounded him, and, therefore, but slight perception that he could be resolved. If there were no other way, she could, per-

haps, drag herself to Cambridge; and yet she felt that his insistence upon it would be an outrage.

As the day wore on the conviction grew upon her that he must relent. It was so unlike him to hold out in anger against her! Sooner or later he had always come to throw himself at her feet. There had been differences between them in which she knew that he was right; and yet he had been the first to return and plead for her forgiveness. So he would return again, she said; but this time she would forestall his humility by her own.

Pallid, anxious, and restless, she wandered all day from room to room, counting the hours as they went by.

"Don't let any one in," she ordered a servant, as the short winter afternoon closed down, "unless it should be Lady or Miss de Bohun. Or my mother or Mrs. Vassall, of course," she added. Then she began again to wander from room to room, listening intently for the familiar sound of Harry's latch-key at the door.

The lights were lit in the drawing-room, and the tea brought in, when Hippolyta was announced. Petrina was glad of some one to divert her thoughts. Besides, Hippolyta would tell her if Harry had sent any message as to their coming to Cambridge.

"Mamma told me to wait for her here," the girl said as she entered, and kissed Petrina. Hippolyta looked older than when in England; with her height, her dignity, and her repose, she had the air of a woman rather than of a girl.

Since their coming to America Petrina had begun to find Hippolyta a little trying. "She is so aggressively good," she had said to Mrs. Faneuil. "She is like a living reproach to the rest of us. How Humphrey and Emmy should have come by such a child passes my understanding. The truth is that she is a Vassall, with

the Vassalls' tendency to thank the Lord that they are not as other men. The law of atavism has cut a terrible caprice in giving an English girl a New England conscience. The one is serious enough without the other. When they go together you have goodness infused not only with Pilgrim zeal and Puritan severity, but with English pugnacity as well. That's Hippolyta. The combination doubtless makes for heroism, but it is awful to chaperon at a dinner or a dance."

But to-day Petrina was glad to see Hippolyta enter.

"So your mother is coming here?"

"Yes," the girl answered. "She has just gone in to the Quincy Brattles. She begs you to keep some tea for her, as they never give her any there."

It was a relief to Petrina that Hippolyta said nothing of the proposed move to Cambridge. It was evident that Vassall had not informed his mother. In that case he could only mean to return to Beacon Street. As she poured out Hippolyta's tea, Petrina felt as if a weight were lifted from her heart.

As she and Hippolyta chatted of things in Cambridge, the servant entered with a card on a silver salver.

"Didn't you say I was not receiving, Marks?" Petrina asked, impatiently.

"Yes'm," the man replied, "but the gentleman said he knew you'd see him."

"Why, it's your father," Petrina cried, as she took the card.

"How delightful!" Hippolyta exclaimed. "I thought he was in Chicago."

"Show Sir Humphrey up," Petrina said to the servant, "and bring some more hot water."

"But mother will come in," whispered Hippolyta, as they heard Sir Humphrey approach. "She wouldn't

like to meet him without warning. It would upset her. What shall we do?"

"Slip out through that room," Petrina whispered back. "You can meet her at the door and come in together."

Hippolyta parted the portières and passed into the next room just as her father entered.

"How nice this is, Humphrey!" the girl heard Petrina say. "And Gentian! Why, you take my breath away. I didn't know you were there."

Hippolyta paused behind the hangings. She knew it was not right; but a sudden fear held her spell-bound.

"I didn't send in my name," Gentian said, in her deep, distinct voice. "I thought I would come in under Humphrey's banner."

"I'm very glad to see you both. Sit down and have some tea."

Petrina resumed her seat, but the others remained standing.

"What's the matter with you two?" Petrina asked, looking up at them curiously. "Humphrey, you're smiling and blushing like a big boy. What have you been doing? Why aren't you in Chicago?"

"Because this little woman brought me back," he answered, turning awkwardly towards Gentian.

"What little woman? Do sit down, Gentian. You look like two bad children, standing there and looking so foolish. What have you been up to?"

"Oh, do tell her, Humphrey," Gentian pleaded, slipping behind him and playfully pushing him forward.

"Well, the fact is," he began, manfully—"the fact is—"

"Yes? Yes?" Petrina interposed, impatiently. "Be quick."

"That we're married," Sir Humphrey gasped, and then burst into a loud, embarrassed laugh.

Dumfounded, Petrina sat looking up at them.

"Well?" said Gentian, at last. "Have you nothing to say to us?"

"Wait till I get my breath," Petrina replied. "It's enough to upset one's senses. But I must congratulate you, I suppose. Well, Humphrey," she continued, rising, "here's my hand on it. I hope it's all right. It's a little sudden, Gentian; but I trust you're going to be happy."

Gentian threw her arms about Petrina, and the two embraced.

"Gad, here's Polly!" Sir Humphrey cried. "I didn't know she was in the house."

Petrina released herself hurriedly. Hippolyta had re-entered the room, and was standing nervously clutching the closed portières in her hand.

"Now for a scene if not a scandal," thought Petrina. "Good gracious! how shall I manage them?"

But Sir Humphrey plunged in boldly.

"I'm delighted to see you, Polly," he said, taking her hand and kissing her cheek. "You've arrived right in the nick of time. Let me introduce you to your new—"

"New what, papa?" the girl asked, with her eyes fixed on Gentian.

"Well, I mean my wife," Sir Humphrey finished, lamely.

Gentian stood smiling nervously.

"I'm your new mother, dear," she said, going up to Hippolyta and holding out her hand. "You remember me, don't you? At Orpington Park, you know—"

"Yes, I remember you, Miss Tyrell," Hippolyta said, mechanically, but not taking the proffered hand.

"I'm your new mother, dear," Gentian repeated, quailing inwardly, but wearing her smile undauntedly.

"I have a mother."

"Yes, dear, but I come to bring you an added love."

"Do you think we need you? Do you think we shall accept you?"

"I am your father's wife, Hippolyta," Gentian insisted, the smile waning and her face growing a little pale.

"I have called you Miss Tyrell. Will you not return the courtesy by calling me Miss de Bohun?"

"But in a family—" Gentian began to protest.

"You are not in our family, Miss Tyrell."

"I must ask you to remember," said Sir Humphrey to his daughter, "that this is Lady de Bohun."

"My mother is Lady de Bohun, papa. There is no other."

"Then who am I?" Gentian cried, ill-advisedly.

"I wonder you raise that question, Miss Tyrell," Hippolyta said, scornfully; "but since you do, it isn't difficult to answer. You may bear some sort of legalized relation to my father—exactly what, it would be impossible to define; but you are not in any real sense of the word his wife. People will feel about you, you probably feel about yourself, that you are the latest member of that company of my father's friends in which Miss Hetty Vienne and Miss Lucy Fitzalan are your predecessors and companions."

"How dare you?" Gentian's voice was scarcely audible; and her face and lips were white. Sir Humphrey and Petrina stood aghast.

"The daring isn't mine, Miss Tyrell," Hippolyta replied, hardly. "It is that of a woman who, with so little to gain, puts herself in a position in which she never can be regarded as other than a superior sort of courtesan."

"Humphrey!" cried Gentian, "am I to be subjected to this?"

"Only, Miss Tyrell," Hippolyta hastened to reply—"only when you thrust yourself among people who still have some respect for the sanctity of family love and of domestic purity. There a woman of your class may expect to find pity, but never mercy."

With a little cry Gentian sank into a seat.

"Take me away, Humphrey," she sobbed. "I didn't look for this. I can't bear it."

"Hippolyta," said the father, white to the lips, and quivering in the helplessness of his rage, "if I knew any way to punish you—"

"Oh, you've found that, papa," she interrupted, with bitter quietness. "It is in your own shame; it is in the dishonor to which you have brought us all. That's my punishment. Some day it will be yours. You can see it is already hers."

"Take me away! Take me away, Humphrey!" moaned Gentian.

"No, Gentian," said Petrina, recovering from the suddenness of Hippolyta's attack, and coming forward. "You are in my house and under my protection. A great injustice has been done you. You are Humphrey's wife by everything that we call law. Hippolyta, you are a wicked and malignant girl."

"You may think what you like about me, Petrina," Hippolyta returned, without losing her cold composure. "But you know in your own heart that my mother is my father's wife, and that this lady is—the thing which I have said. Good-bye, father," she said, in another tone, turning towards Sir Humphrey. "When you have broken off this connection, as I think you have broken off the others, I will see you again, but not before. Good-bye, Petrina."

She pushed aside the portières and slipped out. There was no sound but that of Gentian's sobbing until they heard the street door close behind Hippolyta.

With Sir Humphrey kneeling on one side and Petrina on the other, Gentian was comforted into calm again. Suddenly Petrina remembered that Emilia was soon to arrive.

"We mustn't have another scene," she thought. "You two stay here," she said, aloud. "Gentian, stop crying, and give Humphrey his tea. Don't leave this room till I come back again."

Petrina left them and carefully closed the doors behind her. Then she took her station at a window which commanded the approach to the house. Presently Lady de Bohun, looking dainty and fragile, and wonderfully young for her years, came briskly up the steps. Petrina opened the door before Emilia could ring.

"Have you seen Hippolyta?" Petrina asked, drawing her sister-in-law into a small waiting-room.

"No. Isn't she here?"

"She was, but she went away," said Petrina, shutting the door behind her.

"What is it?" Lady de Bohun asked, with an air of mild surprise. "How mysterious you seem."

"Sit down, dear. I must tell you something."

"Is it about Harry?" Lady de Bohun asked, taking a seat and beginning to unfasten her veil.

"No; it's something very serious."

"Then it's about Humphrey?"

"Yes, dear."

"He's ill," Lady de Bohun cried, with a sudden pallor.

"No; he's quite well."

"Then what is it, Petrina? Don't make so much mystery, for Heaven's sake."

"He's here, Emmy."

"Here? Where? I'm not afraid of him. He won't eat me."

"He's in this house."

The color mounted to Lady de Bohun's cheek, and a light flashed in her eyes.

"Oh, Petrina dear," she said, softly, "it's so long since I've seen him, and I want to, so much. I know now that I care for him, and that you can't dissolve a marriage by a decision of a judge. Where is he? In the drawing-room? Let me go in alone. Give us just a minute together."

She attempted to rise, but Petrina pushed her gently back into her seat.

"Emmy, dear Emmy, I've got bad news for you. Humphrey is here, but he's married again."

That moment was the end of all Emilia de Bohun's well-conserved, youthful prettiness. It faded second by second from her face, and never bloomed again. But she did not strive nor cry. She neither winced nor flinched. She would not suffer even Petrina to see to what depth she had the power to feel.

"How queer!" she said, with a little nervous gasp. "Humphrey married again! Well, well, well! and just as I was beginning to fancy—but, of course, it was only fancy. I suppose it's Gentian Tyrell?"

"Yes."

"I suspected it from the first. I knew she was born to intrigue. And poor Humphrey is such a goose. He's always clay where a woman is the potter."

They sat awhile in silence. Lady de Bohun looked musingly at the point of her tiny shoe.

"How queer!" she said again. "Humphrey with another wife! It makes me feel quite *désorientée*. What is she going to call herself?"

"I suppose she is Lady de Bohun."

"Then there are two of us. It's quite Mahometan, isn't it? But I am the Sultana, and she is only the *odalisque*. Well, Petrina dear, I shall go away and think of it. Luckily there are lots of good fish in the sea. If it weren't for that I might feel worse than I do. Well, well, well! to think of Humphrey with two wives. I can't get over it. I shall get used to it, no doubt, in time—"

"When you've married Gerald Bertie."

Lady de Bohun laughed and rose.

"I think that will take more pluck than I can command; but—"

She shrugged her shoulders, and began to put on her veil again.

"Don't go yet, Emmy," Petrina said; "I've something more to tell you."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Lady de Bohun, sitting down again. "You're more exciting to-day than an extra special."

"A great injustice has been done Humphrey and Gentian."

"If Nemesis has been quick to act you won't expect me to complain. I feel as if she had been unduly hurried in overtaking me; therefore—"

"It's something that you could put right if you only would."

"And I won't."

"Hippolyta has been here. She saw them."

"Then I'm sorry for them, if she spoke her mind."

"Which is just what she did."

"Bravo, Polly!"

"You wouldn't say that, Emmy, if you had heard how she insulted Gentian."

"Well, I didn't hear."

"But I think you ought to know. She told her to her face, and before Humphrey, that she belonged to the same class as Lucy Fitzalan and Hetty Vienne."

"She's her mother's daughter. I shouldn't go so far as that myself, but it's precisely what I feel."

"To poor Gentian it cut like a whip-lash across the face—and to Humphrey, too."

"Naturally. It would to anybody."

"And I think, Emmy dear," Petrina pursued, "that under all the circumstances you ought to see if you cannot make some reparation. You ought to recognize their marriage. It would mean everything to them."

"I shall do nothing of the kind."

"Then," said Petrina, with dignity, "you are less reasonable and less good than I supposed you were. You know I dislike Gentian, but I dislike injustice more. I think you ought to remember what you have done to Humphrey. He was a good husband as husbands go. He wasn't everything you could wish, but you weren't particular about that. You let him go his own way until it suited your purposes to drive him from you. You did it in order to be free to marry some one else. It was not his wish; he only accepted yours. You gave him his entire liberty when you took your own. And now, because he acts in accordance with the freedom which you yourself insisted on—"

"For goodness' sake, stop, Petrina!" Lady de Bohun cried, springing to her feet. "Where are they? If Humphrey's feeling badly, I suppose I must do what I can to comfort him. It isn't for her, mind," she added, as Petrina opened the door and led the way towards the drawing-room.

"O Lord, help me to carry it through without hysterics," Lady de Bohun breathed as she passed down the hall. It was her first real prayer in years.

Sir Humphrey and Gentian rose with something like terror as they saw Emilia enter; but her outstretched hand reassured them.

"I've heard the news," she cried, gayly, as she went towards Gentian, "and I've come to pronounce my malediction."

"Oh, Emmy, how kind you are!" Gentian said, the color returning to her white, tear-stained face as they grasped hands.

"Not at all," returned Emilia. "I'm a dog in the manger; but I couldn't resist coming in to see how you looked. As for you, Humphrey," she went on, offering her hand to him, "I shall never, never forgive you. At least, I shouldn't if you weren't one of the nicest men I ever— Oh, Petrina," she cried, nervously, "don't stare at me like that, as if I were shovelling earth into my own grave! Why don't you give me some tea?"

"Let me make it for you," said Gentian, hastening to sit down at the tea-table.

Sir Humphrey laughed in his boyish, embarrassed way.

"I don't know what to say, Emmy," he began.

"You never do. You never did. You never will," she interrupted, as she took her cup of tea. "Gentian, you'll find some day what a terrible thing it is to live with a dumb man who can do nothing but smile till he blinds you. But I have some tips to give you when we are quite alone. How good this tea is! Humphrey, please hand me the biscuits."

She sat down on the window-seat. Humphrey brought the biscuits and slipped into the place beside her. Petrina and Gentian were whispering over the tea-kettle and spirit-lamp.

"This is a rum go," Sir Humphrey said, in a

low voice, as he held the plate of biscuits before Emilia.

"It's a rum life," she returned, laconically.

"It's queer to meet like this, Emmy. But, then, you haven't any heart."

"I was just finding out that I had one when you broke it, Humphrey dear."

"For God's sake, Emmy! You don't mean that you would have made it up?"

"I mean only that it's a comfort to think that in the kingdom of heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage, and that the crooked is made straight. Do take those biscuits back to Gentian. You're letting them fall on the floor."

Before Humphrey could return to her, Emilia had risen.

"I must go now, good people. Shed a tear for me when I'm gone. Good-bye, Gentian. A year hence we shall be comparing notes over the nicest and the worst of men. Good-bye, Humphrey."

They clasped hands, and stood for a moment eyes deep in eyes. Gentian felt a sudden sinking of the heart. "After all," she thought with a pang, "it is they who must be truly man and wife. He and I can never be to each other what they have been. Is it possible that the girl was right?"

But she took Emilia's hand again and whispered a "God bless you!" as the first wife left the room.

"You're a brick, Emmy," said Petrina at the door.

"Yes," said Lady de Bohun, "but that's because I am so hard. Humphrey himself says I haven't any heart."

She tried to laugh, but without much success.

Then she went down the steps, and, entering the carriage, drove away alone into the dark.

Sir Humphrey and Gentian took their leave at once—he grave as if with a new thought, she eloquent with gratitude.

As the door closed behind them, Petrina turned instinctively to look at the tall clock in the vestibule. It was after seven. Then she suddenly remembered what the events of the last hour had driven from her mind.

Vassall had not come.

CHAPTER IV

"BUT he *will* come," Petrina said to herself. "It is late; but he *will* come."

So she changed her dress for the one he liked best, and clasped round her neck the collar of pearls and diamonds he had given her when they were married.

"Mr. Vassall has been delayed," she said to the servant who came to announce dinner. "I will wait for him."

But when an hour had passed, she sat down alone. She could not eat; she could only wait and listen.

"He has gone to Cambridge, after all," she said, as the tall clock struck nine. "He will dine there; but afterwards he will miss me and return. I feel as if he were already on the way."

So she kept her composure before the servants, and after dinner sat down in the library to read. Her eyes were upon the open page, which she did not turn; but her senses were strained to catch every footstep in the street.

The clock in the vestibule struck ten.

"He will not sleep there," she said. "He couldn't do that. He will remember that I am here alone, and he will come."

She closed her book, and went down to the waiting-room near the door. There was a small bow-window which commanded the approach to the house from both directions. It was here she had waited for Emmy in the afternoon. She sat down again, and began strain-

ing her eyes through the darkness. It was snowing lightly, and the gas-lamps, in a long, double line, shone faintly, like stars striving to throw their light to each other through the mists of space. Carriages rolled by, their rumble softened by the snow. People were returning from theatres and dinners. The passers-by on foot were few. Only now and then could Petrina see some muffled figure come slowly into vision through the flickering, fantastic light. Then her heart beat faster. Surely it was Harry. It was his walk. No—no—no—yes—no—and then the man would go by.

The clock in the vestibule struck eleven. It was the Westminster chime, and Petrina thought of the days which she and Harry had spent together in London.

"He is waiting till the last minute," she said. "He would not come before for fear of passing me on the way. Dear Harry! I've tried him so! He is so proud! But after to-night I will be better. When he comes he will find me humbled."

She smiled to think how she should beg his pardon—so earnestly and meekly—as she had never expected to beg any man's. She smiled again to think of his pleasure and surprise at finding her waiting, certain that he would come.

Fewer carriages rolled by now, and it was only at long intervals that she saw any one on foot. The snow fell steadily, gently, without wind; it lay on the streets, the steps, the housetops like something deathlike. She shivered. It was growing colder. The clock in the vestibule tolled twelve.

"Tell the servants to go to bed," she said to her maid, a little later. "I will wait up for Mr. Vassall. Leave the street door unlocked and the lights burning, and bring me a shawl."

Then she sat on and on in the darkened room, peer-

ing into the strange white night. There were no more carriages, no more people going by on foot. There was nothing to see but the snow and the lamps throwing out useless blots of light into the empty street.

The house was still, but the silence was broken from time to time by queer, startling sounds which were never heard in the daytime. Petrina drew the shawl closer around her, and watched on. She had grown accustomed to the striking of the clock, and had scarcely noticed when it boomed out one and two.

"He has gone to bed in Cambridge," she thought, "but it will not be to sleep. He will get up again. He will come to me through the snow. It is far, and he must walk; that is why he is so long."

But the clock tolled three and four and five, and Petrina began to realize that her vigil was in vain. The conviction came slowly and cruelly, but with crushing certainty. She was numb with cold; her eyes ached with looking at the snow. When she rose at last she could scarcely drag herself to the stairway. As she passed the unlighted music-room the portières were apart, and a great black chasm lay beyond. It was strange to think that only last night Chosette had been singing and La Madrilena dancing there, for now it seemed like years.

The house looked strange and staring, with the futile lights flaming in halls and drawing-room. Petrina put them out, and went towards her own room. At each step she paused to listen. Slight sounds reached her, like the rattling of a latch-key at the door. But it was nothing; no one came in.

Her room, as she entered it, looked big and unfamiliar. Its luxury and coquetry smote her with a sense of vanity. They were like warmth and comfort offered to the dead. She stood for a moment and

looked at herself in the pier-glass. The reflection she saw there—a deserted woman tricked out in pearls and diamonds and fashionable gewgaws—seemed to her grotesque.

"My face has grown older to-night," she thought. "It will never look quite young again. But it won't matter now."

She was cold, and crossed to the dying fire. The embers threw out a little heat, and she stood shivering before them. On the mantel-piece was Vassall's photograph, framed in brown and gold.

"My husband," she said. "He has left me. He has abandoned me. How curious that I, of all women, should have come to this."

Then over her swept a great wave of self-pity. She felt so forlorn! She was not accustomed to suffering. She had never expected to call and have no one answer, to offer and have no one willing to receive.

She bowed her brows upon her hands as she leaned over the framed portrait on the mantel-piece, and the tears came pouring down. She was not used to crying, and it rent her sorely.

"Oh, Harry, Harry," she moaned within herself, "you're cruel to me, you're cruel to me. I sent you away, but I didn't want you to go. I rebelled against you, but I wanted you to master me. I fought against you, but I wanted you to be stronger than I—to teach me, to force me to do right, to break me to your will. I would have yielded if you had pressed. But you didn't. You never did. You never cared. You've been so hard with me. Just because I told you to go, you went. Oh, Harry, I've sent you away. Now you're so far from me—across the river—across the snow—and I'm so cold and lonely."

She shivered and sobbed till the fountain of her tears

was dried. Then the silver-toned clock in Vassall's dressing-room struck six.

"He will not come now," she said, and yet with every sound she listened. She went down-stairs again and looked out into the street. It had stopped snowing; she could see the stars. Heavy vehicles began to go by, leaving rough furrows in the snow-covered street behind them. The city life was waking.

"He will not come now," she repeated, and went up-stairs again.

But something in her was changing. She was not a woman to be rejected twice, nor to submit a second time to humiliation. As the dawn broke she held her head higher, and walked with haughtier tread.

"If I have stabbed him," she said, "he has stabbed me back; only in this case it is the man who has struck the woman."

Her natural energy was returning, and with it a feeling of anger that he should have been so pitiless; that he should have subjected her to this vain watching.

"I shall never forget to-night," she said. "It is unworthy of him to have inflicted this upon me."

Her self-reproach for having driven him away was passing into resentment against him for having gone.

She went into his room. The cold winter light was just struggling through the curtains. Everything was as usual—the brushes on the dressing-table, the boots and shoes in a long line against the wall. Her breath caught as she looked at them. She had that strange sense of something irrevocably over, with which we regard the homely, common things which have been used by those whose earthly needs are ended.

"O God!" she moaned, instinctively calling on a name in which she had no faith. "O God! O God! O God!"

But she moved about the room, aimlessly touching objects here and there, taking up and putting down costly toilet things which she had given him. Here amid what was intimate to his very person, the sense of abandonment smote her to the core.

"He is gone—quite gone," she said; and threw herself wearily upon his bed.

She could not cry again. She had no more tears to shed. She could only lie still and let the iron enter into her soul. The clock struck seven.

"I shall not forgive him now," she said, "not even when he comes."

But he never came again.

Part IV

CHAPTER I

WHEN two years were over Petrina obtained a divorce. Her marriage had grown irksome to her. She felt it less like a chain which impeded her action than like a sin which rested upon her conscience. As long as she remained Henry Vassall's wife her separation from him caused her some self-reproach. She wanted to close this incident in her life, to shut out his face from her memory. He haunted her, and she meant to lay the ghost. Once free from him, she told herself, her peace would no longer be disturbed.

That she had suffered none but herself and one other knew; and that other was not Vassall. He had judged her as the world had judged. He had written her down in his book of life as heartless, hard, and conscienceless, while she did her best to justify the verdict.

From her night of useless watching her spirit had revolted with a sense of outraged womanhood. For the man who had subjected her to that she could never have anything but disdain. The unrewarded waiting had been more humiliating to her than a blow; it had been less pardonable than an accusation of dishonor. Time, she said, could not soften the insult of it; penitence could not wash it out with tears.

So she rejected Vassall's terms of peace and all his propositions for a reconciliation. It is true that he did not come with them humbly. His suggestions were not pleadings, but dictations. In all his treaties the first article was her unconditional surrender—a clause

she would not stoop even to deride. She did not know that his own pride had been wounded. She never suspected that the arrows she thought harmless could for him have been tipped with poison. She did not realize that as the queen's frown sends the courtier, who has presumed too far, back with confusion into the crowd, to wait until he is called again, so Vassall waited too, counting it her place to throw him the first sign of favor. His very reverence kept him away; his very belief that she was above him made him resolute not to intrude again. A sigh from her would have summoned him like a slave; a tear from her would have swept over his spirit like a flood. He did not know that through all one cruel night she had wept and sighed for him in vain.

Petrina's friends were still in the flush of gossip over the audacity of her New Year's vaudeville when they learned that Vassall had left her. She became thus a topic of double disapproval. Horrible woodcuts of her appeared in the common prints, and vulgarly written paragraphs told of her actions past, present, and to come. A woman whose own husband, after a few months of marriage, finds her levity insupportable, naturally furnishes a suitable subject to both the journalist and the *raconteur*. To Petrina's fastidiousness this notoriety was revolting; but she bore it, she almost courted it, knowing that to Vassall it would be more revolting still. It was his name as much as hers which was gaining this undesired publicity.

A fortnight after the opening of her music-room, and also on a Sunday evening, she invited her friends again. Quincy Brattle spoke of Mademoiselle Chosette as positively *émoustillante*, and said that La Madrilena was more Spanish than ever in her attitudes and antics. A company of gayly dressed Tziganes added that Bo-

hemian touch which Petrina thought appropriate to the Sabbath.

Another social success was scored, and Vassall's face grew a shade more gray as he read the reporter's account of it on his way to the office next morning. For Petrina it was the beginning of a season of excitement. She stopped at nothing which would startle old-fashioned prejudice or give her husband pain. She was consciously reckless and feverishly indiscreet. When she knew that gossip coupled her name with that of Saltonstall Browne or Bowdoin Somerset, or any other of the young men who surrounded her, she did her best to give the report some semblance of foundation. The fact that she was severely criticised incited her to deserve it. The feeling that she had been unjustly treated by those whose principles were religious or conservative urged her to fling her glove in their faces. She laughed at rebuke and rejected good advice. Of the folly of her life she was more aware than any one, but it gave an outlet to her need of action and kept her from confronting the fact that she had failed.

For she *had* failed. She had failed in her marriage, and she had failed in her social projects. As the winter waned she found herself, not the centre of that resuscitated Boston of which she dreamed, but the ring-leader of a noisy, foolish band of young people, married and single, whose wit was to be flippant, and whose distinction to be coarse. Petrina despised them all, the men for their weakness and the women for their manners; she went among them like a fallen angel seeking refuge with the lesser breed of men. She joined in their gayeties and led their laughter and made them believe that she was one of them. But when from the dance or the theatre or the supper a little too late she returned to the silence and the solitude of her empty

house, she knew that her spirit had other ideals, and that she was wandering astray.

One by one the people for whose good opinion she would have cared fell away from her. Between herself and her step-mother there had sprung up a misunderstanding born of Petrina's scorn of counsel. Lady de Bohun and Hippolyta had returned early in the year to England. Humphrey and Gentian were in Italy. As spring drew near Petrina felt her loneliness. Between herself and Vassall the silence was complete. In the beginning of their separation they had written now and then, but even that had ceased. They had met, too, once or twice, but Petrina made so marked a show of her disdain that Vassall was careful that they should not meet again.

But it was when the grass was growing long and the trees were in leaf and the thrushes were back and the shrubs were in blossom and the great yearning of spring was in the heart that Petrina began to realize that she was friendless. From her associates of the winter she turned away; all others turned from her.

Then two things happened.

One day there crept into her house a little shrunken woman in fashionless black—a woman who had aged in the past winter more than during twenty years. It was Mrs. Vassall. Petrina was conscious of a pang of compunction as she looked at her. Emmy's and Harry's troubles had fallen heavily on a spirit which had already borne the trials of two generations. Mrs. Vassall had carried her parents' sorrows, her husband's, and her own. She had been strong and meek and brave. And now the generation which should have sustained the steps that had begun to totter was bringing its new load to lay upon her heart.

Perhaps it was the sight of this; perhaps it was some

hidden, hitherto unsuspected sympathy; perhaps it was the prompting of the strong to protect the feeble; perhaps it was the urging of her own spiritual, aching need; something there was which impelled Petrina, before a word on either side was spoken, to throw her arms about the frail, broken-hearted little lady and whisper inarticulate words of welcome.

If Mrs. Vassall came to accuse, she stayed to comfort and be comforted. Between the young woman, proud and rebellious, and the old woman, chastened and beaten down, there was some inexplicable, feminine understanding which helped the one to justify the other. Spiritually far apart they could not but remain, and yet in some secret experience they found a common standing-ground.

"I know how his father was," the little mother murmured, and in the words there was a whole history of unacknowledged trial. She who had brought herself to submit to the parent could comprehend the revolt of her who would not submit to the son. So Petrina found a friend; and at least one heart knew that, in spite of all appearances, she was grieving bitterly.

Then another thing happened. Mrs. Faneuil's malady declared itself beyond concealment. With the first cries of contrition she ever uttered Petrina besought her step-mother's pardon. On both sides, and for many reasons, the reconciliation was soothing and sweet. There followed for Petrina a year of nursing and seclusion. The summer and autumn were passed at Faneuil Hill, the winter in the South. Mrs. Faneuil died just as they were coming North.

Petrina spent the summer at Faneuil Hill again. Her grief for her step-mother's death almost wiped out the recollection of her other sorrows. When, as the autumn came on, she recovered something of her usual

tone, Vassall seemed very far away from her. She had learned to do without him; she was beginning to forget him. It was with a start that she remembered from time to time that he was still her husband. He belonged, she felt, to a very distant past—distant not as the years went, but distant as the dream is after one has waked from it.

When she left Faneuil Hill Petrina did not return to Boston. She went elsewhere, and took measures for her divorce.

She was desolate; she was alone; it would be better to be free; for then she could at least begin some sort of active life again.

CHAPTER II

BUT new beginnings are not easy. We like to feel that each event of life is linked to the last. Our instinct is for growth rather than for transplantation. The career of broken experiences may be rich, but that of simple, steady progress is the more likely to give peace.

If Petrina did not know this before her divorce, she realized it afterwards. When the only tie in her life was loosed, her isolation became appalling to herself; her liberty was awful.

"Not to have a duty towards any one," she mused; "not to know any one who has a duty towards me!"

During her brief married life she had been anxious not to have a child. Now she envied every mother who carried a baby in her arms. Her grief for Mrs. Faneuil's death passed into a permanent sense of loss; her sentiment towards Vassall became a dull, resentful pain. Beyond those two emotions her heart was numb.

"My life is as free and empty as the ocean," she reflected, as she sat on the deck of the *Kaiserin Friedrich*, steaming towards Italy. "And as homeless," she added, with a sigh.

She was travelling without aim and without desire. Her only motive for going anywhere was to escape from Boston and the past. Italy, as an objective point, was as good as any other, and its spring came early.

"'The world was all before them where to choose
Their place of rest,'"

she quoted, with application to herself; but the very immensity of the choice made it dreary. "I never wanted so much," she thought. "I should have been content with my little Eden; only that I was driven out. Now its gates are shut behind me; swords of fire keep the way, and I shall never be able to go back again. I wonder why it should have happened thus to me? In future, I suppose, I shall do nothing but roam. I shall become like the Flying Dutchman, or the Wandering Jew, or Mr. Lechmere."

She was conscious that the last name was often in her mind. She explained the circumstances by the fact that he, too, had made an unhappy marriage, and had ended it as she had ended hers. For two years she had lost sight of him, though she knew vaguely that he was in the East. When she had last heard of him he was hunting in the Himalayas.

"No doubt I shall see him one of these days," she said to herself. "Wanderers like us are sure to cross each other's paths."

So she was not surprised when she learned from some Boston people at Sorrento that he had returned from India and was in Rome. In April, when she went northward, they met at Tivoli.

Eager to escape from the American and English acquaintances who accosted her everywhere from the Colosseum to the Pincian, Petrina had driven out, early one morning, through the Porta San Lorenzo, and found herself in the green Campagna. Her maid and a courier were with her.

"Drive on to Tivoli," she ordered, her spirits rising with the breath of flowers and sense of solitude. The way was not new to her, but spring in the Roman Campagna is always wonderful. The white comes over its daisies and the scarlet on its poppies like the

flush of youth into the cheek of Faust. It was a rejuvenescence; it is almost a resurrection. The air was soft, the day bright, the great plain solemnly still. Now and then a peasant trudged by, or a wild-eyed shepherd, clad in unshorn sheep-skins, came into view surrounded by his flock.

Petrina was too familiar with the common sights of the Campagna to pay much heed to them, but this morning the vast loneliness of the scene, on which so much had happened, and from which nearly all had disappeared, was in sympathy with her mood. Since her release from Vassall a sense of isolation never left her.

"Here, too," she said to herself, as she looked about her—"here, too, the stage has been cleared, and life is waiting to begin again."

Leaning back in a corner of the carriage, her fancy busied itself with those who had crossed this bit of ground before her—kings, emperors, popes, queens, apostles, soldiers, poets, saints, conquerors, captives, Veii, Gabii, Jews, Greeks, Barbarians, Scythians, bond and free—those sprung from the soil and those gathered from the ends of the earth—every heart among them rejoicing with the pleasure, or aching with the pain, or panting with the fear, or bursting with the pride which were now as wholly gone as Rhea Sylvia's soul from the mists of Anio. The harebells, hyacinths, and anemones were blooming not less gayly than when Mæcenas drove over this road to his villa, or Zenobia to her palace-prison; but of the human effort spent the only signs were a broken aqueduct or a lonely tower here and there; of the human blood poured out there was no memorial save that which fancy saw in the red of the poppies among the grass.

"And now it is my turn," Petrina mused. "I, too,

have come from a far-off land, and am crossing the great green field of Destiny. I am only twenty-seven. Life *must* have something in reserve for me. This very soil is rich with the sleeping energies of the past. Who knows but that I may draw something out of it? These very flowers, blossoming after all that has happened here, are proofs of the persistency of spring. Who knows but that I may gather some of them? This very road has been worn by the feet of those who came from Egypt and Syria and Carthage and Britain, and journeyed here to find their fate. Who knows but that I may be travelling towards mine?"

It was one of those spring mornings when one feels as if the seed of life which has been germinating in monotony must burst into act, and that something interesting must occur.

"What is it to be?" Petrina wondered, as she passed the Plautian tomb and the ruins of the Villa Adriana. But if she had known—if Albunea, the Tiburtine Sybil, had come down from the heights of Tivoli with the books of the future in her hand, if Petrina had been able to read therein and see whither that way was taking her, she might have turned her horses and gone back to Rome. But Albunea's temple is a ruin, and the Sybil's books are burned; and so Petrina drove up the winding olive-bordered road which led to Tivoli and Fate.

"Go to the Villa d'Este," she ordered the coachman as they entered the town.

She longed to escape from the desolation of the Campagna, where Time and Nature seemed that day to smile at the completeness of their triumph over the work of man. She had a desire to find herself in a garden planned by a human mind and planted by human hands. The long drive over the dust of an

obliterated life had chilled her spirit. It had made her feel that she, too, would one day be blotted out, and against that idea her healthy, pagan youth rebelled. It was with a sense of fleeing to a refuge that she thought of the blossoming trees and plashing waters of the garden hanging amid the cliffs above.

She left the carriage to await her in the shadow of the cathedral, and went into the Villa. The sun was growing hot and blinding, and, as she emerged from the long entry-passage into the garden, the coolness and shade were grateful. Under the solemn cypresses the Judas-trees relieved the dimness by their vivid pink; while the lilacs and lemon-trees filled the air with their delicate perfumes. Far below came the sound of cascades and fountains. Petrina crossed the upper terrace and looked down the avenue of cypresses. Terrace lay below terrace. On each succeeding level were acacias and lilacs, Judas-trees, and roses. Fountains, waterfalls, basins, and rillets running through stone channels bordered with maidenhair-fern fed the thirsty hill-side. The marble staircases which led down from plane to plane were moss-edged and worn by time. Here and there between the cypresses the eye had glimpses of Monte Catillo and the towers and roofs of Tivoli. Far down, at the end of the long cypress vista, lay the Campagna, now gleaming with the many colors of the morning.

"History—mystery—romance," Petrina murmured, half aloud. "But not solitude," she added; for up the twisted staircase, from the terrace below, a man was coming towards her.

"Angels always drop from the sky," cried Lechmere, stopping a moment in his ascent.

"But I was obliged to come in a carriage," Petrina

laughed, as she moved to the head of the staircase to meet him.

"Which proves that, after all, it is you and not your spirit, as I feared," Lechmere responded, as they shook hands. "This is a pleasant meeting, Mrs. Vassall—for me."

"And I may say for me," said Petrina, looking at him with a frank smile. She felt suddenly as if her loneliness were being bridged over; as if another human life were touching hers at last. "I hoped to have seen you in Rome," she continued. "I heard you had come back from India. What an age you have left us without news of you!"

"You've had your revenge for that deprivation in the fact that I've had no news of *you*. Where's Harry? Is he here?"

"N—no," Petrina stammered, coloring slightly; "he's in Boston."

"Are you with a party, then?"

"N—no," she said again, opening her sunshade to conceal her embarrassment.

"You're not alone?"

"My maid and a courier are waiting for me outside. But tell me about yourself. How are you? Where have you come from? What have you been doing these two—nearly three—years? Why are you out here, instead of being at the Grand Hotel?"

"Shall we walk down the garden?" he suggested.

"Yes; let us; I haven't been here since I came with dear mamma, five years ago."

"I notice that you're in black?" Lechmere said, in a tone of gentle questioning. "I hope—"

"Mamma died last spring," Petrina replied, gravely. "I will tell you about it some time. This morning I want your news. Another day will do for mine."

"I have none to tell," said Lechmere, as they began to descend. "I've made history only to the extent of a little elephant-hunting and tiger-shooting, and much wasting of time. The best thing I can say is that, since we last met, I've docked off nearly three more years of a conspicuously useless career."

"It still amuses you to talk like that?"

"It amuses me to observe how human existences come from nothing and accomplish nothing and end in nothing. It amuses me to be useless, because I know there is nothing worth while. It amuses me to feel the great exterminator, Time, slowly making an end of me, as he has made an end of everything that used to be out there on the Campagna, and as he is crumbling away this Villa on which Pirro Ligorio, and Ippolyto d'Este spent so much pains. The axe is already laid to the root of the cypresses and Judas-trees. The fountains and cascades run with greater difficulty year by year. Look about you in the grass. The harebells and hyacinths are creeping up in ever-increasing numbers from the wild vegetation of the Campagna below. Sooner or later they will stifle all that man has planted, and fill up all that he has hollowed and hewn. It will be with the Villa d'Este as with the Villa Adriana. It will be ruined with beauty; it will be blotted out under a pall of flowers. So with ourselves. Time is smothering us all under a heap of blessings. It amuses me to feel myself submitting to the process, and to perceive, as years go by, the progress of my own mental, moral, and physical decay."

The tone of these words appealed to Petrina. She knew that while it was half mocking, it was half sincere; and that though Lechmere was only playing at pessimism, yet the motive of the game was disappointment with his life. The perception that he was weak touched

in her that New England impulse to help, which Vassall's sober, philanthropic schemes had always left unmoved. In the needs of the race at large she had no interest; but for this man with the Vandyke mien and gentle eyes and silvering hair and passionate nature she had a ready feminine sympathy. Then, he gave her a sense of companionship. It was a relief to feel that after her long isolation a soul with whom she had some kinship was breaking into her solitude.

"And yet," she said, as they paused before one of the great fountains on the second terrace—"and yet you seem to me a man with an appetite for the joyous part of life. I should have said that you possessed something of my own rather Greek and soulless capacity for being happy."

"Which would mean that we were both foredoomed to misery. As the Goncourts say, *La vie est bien habilement arrangée pour que personne ne soit heureux.* The capacity for joy is the gift of a wicked fairy. It is out of place in a world like this. It has no chance. It doesn't belong to us. You'll find that out one day, if you haven't—"

He hesitated. Petrina screened her face from him with her sunshade and moved away.

"If you haven't done so already," he finished, as they began to descend another flight of steps.

"How curious it is that you should be here at Tivoli," Petrina remarked, with an effort to change the subject. "I thought you would be in Rome."

"I've been up in Subiaco with some artist chaps. When they went on to Florence I decided to stop over a day or two at Tivoli. This is one of the few places in which a haunted soul finds peace. There's nothing here that doesn't tell you that no grief can last long. There's been so much of it in the bit of country on which

these hills look out! and now it's all over! The time hasn't been so very long, even if we go back to the anguish of Rhea Sylvia bringing forth the sons of her dishonor. And between that day and this, what a torturing of poor, proud human worms! What sport it has been for the imperial gods to watch them wriggle and expire! But, you see, it's all over. That's the soothing part of it. You learn here that your own suffering is of no consequence. When your cries go up from a spot like this they are no more audible than the shrieks of a crushed ant. The Alban Hills throw back so many echoes of pain that your own voice is drowned. Where there have been such heroic agonies our own woes seem small. I suppose you're not old enough to know the balm of that. But by-and-by, when you and Harry begin to learn that the fire of love can burn low—"

"What a sense of mystery there is in this garden!" Petrina interrupted, eager again to change his theme. "It has always seemed to me as if the tales of the Decameron might have been told here. I suppose it is the effect of cypress and shade in contrast with sunshine and flowers, and all this plashing of waters."

"And something that belongs to the sixteenth century and to Italy—to the time and place when men and women were not afraid of love and hate and life and death. These are the haunts of great, primal emotions. Their memory lingers in the solemnity of the cypresses and the perfume of the lemon-trees. That's the attraction to us, who know of passion only in the melodrama, and who restrict the intensity of life to the third act of a play. We have to live on the strong things other men have felt because we are too timid, or too self-conscious, or too feeble to feel strong things ourselves. It is passion that builds palaces and plants gardens and puts into nature something of the human

thrill. But there is no passion any more. We Americans know of it from books and pictures and spots like this, but we should laugh at it in ourselves."

"And yet you yourself—" Petrina began, rather daringly.

"Oh, I'm no example, Mrs. Vassall. I'm only a poor, out-of-date devil, who had no business to be born later than the time of the great Popes and the Medici. That's why, of recent years, I've kept out of people's way. They despise me, and I despise myself."

"But I don't."

"I know you don't. That's the reason I'm so inexpressibly glad to see you. I've felt that you had some little shade of friendship for me, ever since the night we talked of it at Orpington Park."

"Then why have you kept out of my sight so long? At the very least, you might have written me a line to tell me you were living. There have been times when I didn't know even that; and I've thought a good deal about you. It wasn't kind."

"Wasn't it? I'm glad to hear you say so, because I like to know you cared. Only, while we're talking about it, I may say that, when we last met, Harry didn't seem to me quite the same. He gave me the cold shoulder, or I thought he did. I was sorry, for I couldn't see the reason why—unless it was because, one night at Ashuelot, before you were married, I let him see what a fool I was. He's been my best friend for twenty years; and so if you could put me right with him—"

"I should think we could get a good view of the villa from this point," Petrina said, with apparent tranquillity, turning as she spoke.

They stood at a spot where the avenue of cypress rounds out and forms a circular enclosure. At their feet tiny fountains shot up like flowers of spray from

pots of stone. As Petrina and Lechmere looked back up the path by which they had descended, the lavishness of blossom and color was worthy of the way by which angels might come down from God. The wilderness of bloom was cleft only to disclose the stairways and fountains rising tier beyond tier, tier beyond tier, until far above, as though hanging in the air, the villa displayed its long, straight, simple lines.

"What an irony it is," Lechmere observed, "that a garden like this isn't the background for love and pleasure! That's the only way in which it could be put to use. It's perfectly futile to have so much loveliness merely to look at, and not to weave in with the fibres of one's heart."

"In such a place one regrets that there is not a God. If there were, one could offer this beauty up to Him. No other service would be worthy of it. There are some things beyond being dedicated to any merely human use—St. Peter's or Notre Dame, for instance. This is one. I agree with you that such beauty creates a feeling of futility. We're not equal to it. We have no emotions to match it. If we were allowed to live in it, we should want, like Eve, to do something that would force the fates to drive us out. To look at it makes us sad."

They turned again to descend the garden.

"Couldn't we sit down?" Petrina asked. "I'm rather tired, and, besides, I've something to tell you."

"There's a seat by the parapet, over there," Lechmere replied, and presently they came to it. They had reached the lowest limit of the villa grounds. Below them the roots of Tivoli struck down towards the plain. Before them there was nothing but the open, empty Campagna. On the north they could see Montecelli, on the south Frascati, and far on the western sky-

line the dome of St. Peter's made a dark spot in the purple haze.

Petrina sat down; Lechmere leaned on the parapet. For a time they gazed outward in silence.

"This is the Campagna's hour," Lechmere remarked, at last. "It puts on all its hues at noon, just as the Bay of Naples does at sunset."

"I don't think I ever noticed before how wonderful it is," said Petrina, absently. "The tints are as varied as those of an opal, and more vivid."

Again they lapsed into silence, as they noted how the clear green of the foreground, dashed with the scarlet of poppies and the purple of hyacinths, merged farther away into tones of brown and red and rose, shading into blue and mauve, and deepening into amethyst and violet in the distance towards Rome. Lonely towers—refuges once of the rival Orsini and Colonna shepherds—made, in the clear noon-light, patches of burning orange; while the broken aqueducts, festooned against the sky, had all the hues of the rainbow bridges by which the North gods mounted to their heaven. A fringe of osiers or a line of willows marked the course of Anio flowing sluggishly towards the Tiber, after his wild dash through the gorges of Subiaco and, in many cascades, over the rocks of Tivoli. At intervals, between the undulations of the plain, they could trace the dusty thread of the old Tiburtine road, still paved in places with the blocks of lava laid down two thousand years ago, and over which now an occasional wine cart, with revolving hood, could be seen jolting on its way to Rome.

"When I was last here," said Petrina, after a long silence, "I tried not to think. I was young and lighthearted, and it seemed to me that to reflect on haunted ground like this would overpower me."

"And now?"

"Now I feel that I am changed. I've had a great deal of trouble. I don't want to force it on you, but I'm obliged to tell you of it."

"I hope you know that you can count on my sympathy, as I feel that I could count on yours."

"I would rather you heard it from any one but me," Petrina went on, in a low voice, her eyes fixed on the distant dome of St. Peter's. "But you must be told. I've divorced Harry."

"Good God!"

Lechmere's start of surprise was involuntary, but he mastered himself at once.

"There is nothing to be said," Petrina continued, in the same tranquil tone. "He left me in less than a year after we were married—"

"I had heard that, but put it down to idle talk."

"I never quite knew why he did so. There was no trouble between us that could have been called grave. But he left me in a way which I could never pardon, and so—"

Petrina did not finish her sentence. There was no need. She looked towards Lechmere, and their eyes met. He had the instinctive delicacy not to question her, and she was grateful for the silence of his sympathy. After all the blame she had borne, it was comforting, too, to find some one who did not take for granted that she had been in the wrong.

Another long silence fell; and then, by-and-by, they began to speak of trivial things. Lechmere pointed out characteristics of the Campagna new to Petrina, and named the white towns that could be seen nestling among the hills.

"It must be nearly noon," she said, at last. "I ought to be going away."

As she rose their eyes met again, but for the moment there was no embarrassment in their regard. Both felt old; both were tired; both were frankly glad of mutual comprehension. There was a tacit assumption that trouble had made them something more than ordinary friends. From the one to the other there passed a silent offer, and an equally silent acceptance, of consolation and aid.

CHAPTER III

PETRINA felt no awkwardness in the situation until, as they were leaving the grounds of the Villa, Lechmere urged her to lunch with him.

"Thank you," she answered, "but I am going to the Regina."

"You will find it humbler at the Sybilla, but we shall lunch in the open air, in the shadow of the ruined temple, and before one of the most glorious views in Europe. I can't offer you luxury, but my servant makes very good coffee, and will add a few accessories. It won't be so bad. You must come."

"But my courier has already given the orders at the Regina."

"You can drive round and countermand them. Meanwhile I shall go on to the Sybilla and make ready for so illustrious a guest."

"I don't think I can. You are very kind, Mr. Lechmere, but—"

She was beginning to feel uncomfortable. For the first time she saw that her position was a difficult one. He was a divorced man; she a divorced woman. They were both free; but it seemed to her suddenly as if in their freedom there was something vaguely odious.

"Why shouldn't you come?" he urged, as they turned on the highest terrace for one last look down the hill-side of blossom. "Be frank with me. People like ourselves don't have to stop at every step to wonder whether they are acting according to the rules of a book of etiquette.

They have only to be simple and sensible. We meet by accident in a place like Tivoli. It is as if we were cast together on a desert island. It would be absurd for you to go one way and for me to go another. Besides, I insist. I am going to look after you. I shall take you back to Rome, and shall not leave you till I see you safely at the Grand Hotel."

"The Royal," Petrina corrected, and in the correction she felt that she had yielded.

Later the sense of discomfort left her. She could not but admire the delicacy with which he made her feel at ease; while his unobtrusive attentions appealed to her feminine love of being served. It was so good to be taken care of once again! Petrina's independence was only mental. For the common tasks of life she liked to have a man at hand. She was not afraid of managing a difficult social complication; but she shrank from the responsibility of feeing a waiter or paying a cabman or registering her luggage at a station. She had engaged a courier just to have these tasks taken off her hands; but the very necessity of doing so was galling. It forced home the fact, with which she had good reason to be familiar, that she was quite alone. Since arriving in Italy she had drifted without volition. Naples, Castellamare, Sorrento, Amalfi, were stopping-places chosen only because she must have a shelter wherein to lay her head. Rome itself had been no more to her. But now, since Lechmere had crossed her path, a motive seemed to have come into existence. She could not have put the thought into words; it was too new, too daring, even to entertain; but it was none the less pleasant to sit there in the shadow of the Sybil's broken shrine, and to feel that across the gulf of her loneliness a hand was stretched out to help her.

So, looking on the gorge, around which Tivoli clam-

bers and down which the Anio pours his noisy flood, they talked of the new doings of old friends.

"And what of Lady de Bohun?" Lechmere asked.

"Of which?"

"Of both."

"When people say Lady de Bohun nowadays they mean Gentian."

"Then tell me first of her."

"From her own point of view she has made a great success."

"And from yours?"

"From mine, too, I think. She has reduced Humphrey to a condition of docility, and she has secured an uncontested place in English society. She's clever, you know, and she has endless pluck. You could see that years ago, when she made her father and mother remarry. She had a hard fight at first when Humphrey took her to England; but she stood her ground so well that at last all she claimed was conceded. The Duchess of Ambleside and Princess Hans of Markenstein took her up; and now all doors are open to her, except that of Buckingham Palace, which doesn't matter much."

"And what about Emmy?"

"Forgotten. London has proverbially a short memory; but nowhere is it so short as in that precise part of London in which Emmy used to live. People begin to feel that when Humphrey married Gentian he was a widower."

"But Emmy didn't seem the sort of person to submit to extinction."

"Yes and no. She never cared what any one thought or said about her. She doesn't now. If she chose to come forward she could make Gentian seem like a usurper. But she doesn't choose. The game isn't worth the candle to her. And then she always has it in her

power to rise from the dead as Mrs. Gerald Bertie, future Countess of Ullswater."

"Then why doesn't she?"

"I can't quite make her out. I haven't seen her, you know, for two years and more. We write, but ever since our—our troubles, we are less confidential than we used to be. Of course it was only natural that she should think I had been unkind to Harry; and then Humphrey's marriage was a shock to her. I am going to make her a long visit at Orpington Park, and we shall no doubt regain the old footing with each other.

"And how has the girl turned out? She promised to be a beauty. She must be over twenty now."

"Emmy writes that they have given their consent to her becoming some sort of nun. It seems a mad step; but perhaps it is the easiest way out of a difficult situation. Hippolyta refuses absolutely to see her father; and Humphrey is in so much dread of Gentian meeting her by accident in a London drawing-room that he prefers to know she is shut up out of danger in a convent."

"The boy, I suppose, is still at Eton?"

"And doing very badly. That is another source of worry to them. He seemed such a sterling little man; but in growing older he hasn't fulfilled the promise of his childhood. He's eighteen now, and they hope he'll do better when he goes to Oxford. It is curious that he should be following the example of his father and mother just at the time when they are beginning to see that it was a bad one."

"I suppose that's only another form of the visitation of the parents' sins upon the child."

"And on themselves," said Petrina, thoughtfully. "There was a time when I didn't believe that there was such a thing as sin. I don't know that I do now; but

as I grow older I begin to see that there is certainly a tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden of life, and that we must not eat of it nor touch it lest—"

"Lest what?" Lechmere had been sitting sidewise to the table, smoking a cigarette and gazing across the ivy-hung, clematis-clad precipice, towards the Ponte Gregoriano and the cataract plunging beside it. Now he turned and looked Petrina in the eyes.

"Lest what?" he repeated.

"Lest we die, the Bible says. I should read it, lest we live and suffer. I've been thinking a great deal lately of Adam and Eve being driven out of their Paradise. It seems so hard and yet so inevitable. Why is it that when we are in Eden we cannot stay?"

"Have you been there?"

Petrina colored.

"Have you?" she asked, in return.

"Do you remember the lines at the end of *Paradise Lost?* 'The world was all before them—' "

"Don't, please," Petrina laughed, with an effort to seem not serious.

"But you asked me. I was going to answer you. I wanted to say that I know the meaning of those lines. You do, too, I think."

"I don't like Milton. He's too much in earnest."

"I wasn't thinking of Milton so much as of you and me."

The expression in his eyes troubled her.

"And I am thinking of the time," she exclaimed, taking out her watch. "It's nearly two. My people and I should be on the march if we are to get back to Rome before sunset."

"Your people are going in one carriage with my ser-

vant; while you are coming in another with me. It is all arranged. The horses are at the door."

Again Petrina protested faintly, but again she was conscious of the luxury of having some one to take care of her.

And yet that night, alone in her apartments in Rome, she was not free from an indefinable self-reproach.

"I couldn't have acted otherwise," she argued with herself. "He insisted. It would have been foolish to have refused. It is not as if I knew he was going to be there. On other occasions I shall not allow myself to be placed so awkwardly."

She foresaw that there would be other occasions. In fact, Lechmere had offered to come next day and take her to the Palazzo Barbarini to see Guido's Beatrice. She knew the picture was but an excuse for going out together; and yet she had given him leave to come.

"I shall not do it again," she decided. "I can easily find reasons for declining other things."

But to do so became harder than she supposed it would. Lechmere was gentle but importunate. For each day he had a new expedition; and his invitations were given with so much respectful insistence that she found no way of eluding them. Her refusals were always made to seem ridiculous even to herself. They were alone in Rome; they were friends; what more natural than that they should see something of each other? Besides, Petrina felt herself protected by what she knew of the passion of his life. That stood between them. From the man who loved Felicia de Prony, she reasoned, there was nothing at all to fear.

She had almost convinced herself of that when something happened to make her doubt it. Lechmere had suggested a visit to the Catacombs, which she had never seen. One bright morning, therefore, they drove

out the Appian Way, and tried as they went to fancy the feelings of the early Christians who had so often stolen over it towards the same goal.

"It's no use," said Petrina, as they passed the Baths of Caracalla. "I can't. I can see the early Christians only as surrounded by their aureoles, and wearing robes of vivid stained-glass blue and red. This road is so hopelessly ugly and commonplace! I never can think that they bore the body of Cecilia Metella over it, or that St. Peter and Clemens and Claudia crept along it, to sing and pray to Jesus Christ."

"I think it's the very commonness that impresses me," Lechmere returned. "I, too, have the stained-glass-window vision of the saints. But when I come this way, when I jolt over the stones between these bleak, blank walls which give no help to the imagination, and rather restrain than stimulate heroic hallucinations, I realize that the first believers in our faith were men and women with flesh and bones and cowardice like our own, but who overcame everything by belief in a great ideal."

"Are you a Christian, then? I didn't know it."

"I have no active disbelief."

"But no active faith."

"I shouldn't venture to say that. My people, like your husband's—I beg your pardon, like Harry Vassall's—were among the founders of American Episcopalianism. It's hard to shake off hereditary ideas, even when they lose their hold on you."

"Of course. It is atavism that keeps the Christian Church alive."

"Nor should I venture to say that. The Roman slaves and tradesmen whose feet, tramping out to the Catacombs, have given this way a kind of sanctity, must have found something very vital to have made

them what they became. I fancy that that, whatever it may have been, is always here; and that the power which builds and fills the churches is not a mere hereditary doggedness, but a real force which comes out from God."

"I'm surprised to hear you say that. You seem to me otherwise so broad-minded."

"I have an idea, Mrs. Vassall, that the narrowness belongs to the good people who insist on denying that you can see through a telescope that which cannot be discerned by the naked eye. I believe there *is* a telescope."

"I might do so, too, if I ever knew any one who had used one."

"I have."

"You?" Petrina's tone was incredulous. "When? Where? How?"

"I shall answer two of your questions; not the third. When? Less than three years ago. Where? In the Church of St. Stephen in Vienna."

"And how? I insist. I am keenly interested to know."

"The moment may come when I shall tell you. But it isn't to-day."

"How queer you Christian people are! You keep your religious experiences hermetically sealed. You remind me of Gentian de Bohun's mother, who used to belong to a sect in which it was forbidden to speak of their doctrines before non-believers. I never could draw out of Harry Vassall what it was he believed in, or what good it did him to believe it. He seemed to think me too much of an outcast to hear anything about it. He hugged his religion to himself until I grew to be nearly jealous of it. I see that you would do the same. If I ever had much to do with you I am certain your religion,

such as it is, would separate us, just as it stood like a spectre between Harry and me."

Talking thus, they drove up to the gate of entry to the Catacombs.

"How dreary!" she murmured, as they walked up towards the mouth of the pit. "Why hasn't Christianity built a great temple here? If I were Pope, it is on this spot I should have my St. Peter's, rather than on the Vatican. And fancy paying two lire for the privilege of treading in the footsteps of the martyrs," she continued, as they followed the French-speaking Dutch monk who conducted them down into the dark.

"You forget that we come not as pilgrims but as sight-seers; and to scoff rather than to pray. I wonder that we should be admitted at any price."

"I don't like it," Petrina gasped, with a shudder, when they had lost sight of the daylight. The monk went before them with a torch. They heard footsteps and men's laughter behind them.

"*Eh bien, messieurs,*" the monk cried, turning suddenly. "*Que faites-vous là? Vous n'avez pas payé.*"

The monk came back, and the light of the torch revealed two young men with the air of Harvard undergraduates.

"*Je ne crois pas qu'ils vous comprennent,*" said Lechmere.

"*Ils me comprennent assez bien, monsieur,*" expostulated the monk, angrily. "*J'ai plein le dos de ces gaillards américains qui veulent entrer sans payer. Excusez-moi un moment pour que je les reconduise.*"

In an instant the monk had disappeared, followed by the two laughing lads. Petrina and Lechmere were in the dark.

"I'm afraid," she whispered. "Let us go out again. I hate it."

Then she felt Lechmere take her hand.

"It's only for a minute," he said, reassuringly. "There's the light coming back."

Petrina did not withdraw her hand until the monk returned. Then they went on to where the chambers and galleries were lighted.

But her interest was at an end. Through her glove she felt the warmth of the pressure of his hand. She knew it meant nothing, that it could mean nothing; but the very fact that it did mean nothing frightened her. The sense of being in a false position, which had never wholly left her since they had met at Tivoli, returned with increased force.

On the way back to Rome she talked gayly and ignored the incident in the Catacombs, but she had not ceased to feel his hand clasping hers, even when he said good-bye to her at the hotel.

"I forgot to tell you," she called, carelessly, just as he was turning away, "that I leave for Florence tomorrow. I'm so sorry I sha'n't see you again, but no doubt we shall meet somewhere some time. You've been so extremely kind that it's rather *banal* to say Thank you; but I do say it just the same."

"Isn't this a sudden decision?" he asked, with brows knitted, as he came back to her again.

"No; not at all," she answered, untruthfully. "I've been a little tired of Rome for a week and more."

"Ah!"

"That is, I should have been if it hadn't been for you," she added, with compunction.

"Thanks for the qualification," he said, dryly. "Shall you be long in Florence?"

"Only to pass through."

"On your way to—"

"I don't know yet. I'm thinking of London, but

I'm also thinking of Moscow, and of a dozen other places that lie between."

"'The world was all before them where to choose their place of rest,'" Lechmere quoted.

"'And Providence their guide,'" she finished, with a laugh. "That's the nearest intimation I can give you of my future halting-place. So good-bye, and thank you once again."

Lechmere took his dismissal quietly—so quietly that when Petrina went to her room she was a little vexed.

CHAPTER IV

"Pange lingua gloriosi
Corporis mysterium."

PETRINA started from her reverie. The words rose like a cry of mingled grief and victory. The organ rolled out the solemn plain-song with primitive mediæval harmonies. Three thousand Austrian Catholics were singing as they only sing in whom music and devotion are instinctive. Up to the present moment she had sat far back in the church, aloof from the congregation crowding in and about the choir. She was buried in her own thoughts. The voice of the priest in the sanctuary came to her only as a distant murmur; the movements and genuflections of the acolytes, in scarlet cassocks and cottas bordered with lace, were meaningless to her. She was vaguely conscious of many lights about the high altar, and blazing candles carried to and fro. To these details she paid no attention. She had not come to St. Stephen's for afternoon Benediction. She had come—she knew not why. But now, as the hymn arose, she started. The Latin words were familiar to her, but to-day something in them moved her with a curious thrill. *Pange lingua!* It was like the clashing of wild cymbals over tragedy and disaster. *Gloriosi corporis mysterium!* It was like the shout of a host whose faith will not own defeat.

"What do they mean?" she asked herself, as she

looked up the dim aisle at the kneeling, singing multitude. "Some of them are ecstatic. Most of them are sincere. But what do they mean? Was he right when he said, the other day, that the power which enabled the Roman slaves to be martyrs is still here?"

And then she passed into reverie again.

"Nobis datus, nobis natus,
Ex intacta virgine."

The stately hymn rolled on, but Petrina was going back over the drive along the Appian Way to the Catacombs, till she came, for the hundredth time, to the moment when, in the darkness, Lechmere had touched her hand.

"I suppose it is because I am alone," she mused, "that I think so much about him. It is because no one else shows any interest in me that I have come to look to him."

She was not in love with him. She faced that question frankly, and knew that she had not yet reached the moment when she could love any one; but she was aware of some sympathy between them which made her glad when he was near.

Her loneliness weighed on her once more. In leaving Rome she had felt herself setting out again on a trackless, solitary sea. Florence, Verona, and Innsbruck had been stopping-places on the road to nowhere. A certain time must be filled in before the date of her visit to Orpington Park, and to pass those weeks she must wander. She would go to Vienna, she said, because she wanted clothes. But she had not forgotten the remark made by Lechmere in connection with St. Stephen's. She remembered the lofty German Gothic church; she had often noticed its green-tiled, patterned roof when, on other visits to Vienna, she had been shop-

ping in the Graben; but she had never entered. Now, on this Sunday afternoon, she felt a desire to do so. It was a place in which Lechmere had passed through some unusual experience; therefore she would go and see it. As she reached the cathedral vespers were ending, and she seated herself at the west end, apart from the congregation. The service of Benediction began.

"I can understand," she remarked, silently, "that all this pomp and mystery should impress a dreamy nature like his. He is the sort of man to hear in the pealing of the organ through vaulted aisles a voice speaking from heaven. There is something Gothic in his character—something at once mystical and barbaric."

"Verum caro, panem verum,
Verbo carnem efficit."

The kneeling multitude sang out with such a burst of fervor that Petrina looked up the nave again. As she did so the blood rushed hotly to her face; for Lechmere himself was coming down. He was glancing at the people on each side, as though in search of some one. She shrank behind a pillar. It was very dim where she was sitting. He might pass her by.

But the hymn ended in a long, plaintive *Amen*, and Lechmere slipped into a seat. It was the solemn moment of the service. The consecrated host was taken from the tabernacle and exposed. The sanctuary bell rang thrice. Those who had been sitting knelt; those who had been kneeling bent lower. Over the throng there came the hush of self-abasement before the mystery of manifested God. Petrina saw Lechmere fall upon his knees. He bowed himself down, as though in adoring faith. It was her opportunity. She rose softly, and, passing him by, stole quietly from the church.

But before she was out of the Stefansplatz he accosted her.

"I saw you," he said, after they had exchanged greetings. "I heard you go by when you went out. When the people rose I got up and followed you. I hope you don't mind?"

"Only to the extent of being glad to see you." Petrina held out her hand, and tried to show that cordiality which is at once kindly and indifferent. "I thought you would be in Paris by this time."

"No; I've come to Vienna from Innsbruck."

"And you went to Innsbruck from—?"

"Verona."

"And to Verona from—?"

"Florence."

"How curious! I came that way myself."

"I followed you."

"Of course it's a natural route from Rome if one is going to Vienna."

"I wasn't going to Vienna."

"Then I'm glad you changed your mind, since it has given me the opportunity of seeing you again."

"You're all right?"

"Yes, thanks."

"You're quite well?"

"Perfectly."

"Your courier Giannini is satisfactory?"

"Entirely."

"You didn't have any trouble with the customs' officials at Ala?"

"None whatever."

"You're comfortable at the Bristol?"

"In every way."

"Then there's nothing that I can do for you?"

"Thank you very much, but I don't think there is."

"You're not lonely?"

They had reached the Stock-im-Eisen; and Petrina, finding it easier not to answer that question, stopped.

"I'm on foot," she said. "I've sent my carriage back to the hotel."

"So Giannini told me. He said they had left you at the Stefanskirche."

"Will you walk with me, then? Or will you call a carriage for me?"

"Let us walk."

"Then you've been to the hotel?" she said, as they moved along the Kärnthner-Strasse. "How did you know that I was staying there?"

"They told me at the Tyrolerhof at Innsbruck that you were going to the Bristol."

"And at the Hôtel de Londres in Verona they told you I was going to the Tyrolerhof."

"Precisely. And at the Hôtel de la Ville in Florence I learned that I might find you at the Hôtel de Londres in Verona."

"Then you *have* followed me."

"I said so at first."

"May I ask why?"

"Are you going to be offended?"

"That depends."

"I followed you for the reason that I was anxious about you."

"Why?"

"Because you seemed so much alone. I wanted to assure myself that no harm had come to you."

"But what harm could come?"

"I don't know. I was anxious about you. That's all."

"And you have travelled all the way to Vienna to satisfy yourself that Giannini was honest, and that

my luggage had been not unduly taxed at the frontier?"

"I wanted to be sure you were all right. I know it was a liberty; but I should take it again to know that you were free from petty inconveniences. If you are annoyed, don't mind saying so; because, right or wrong, I mean to keep you more or less in sight until I know that you are safe in other hands."

"What a lot of this garnet-work there is in Vienna," Petrina remarked, irrelevantly, pointing as she spoke to a shop-window full of boxes, brooches, and paper-knives incrusted with red stones. "One sees so much of it that one isn't tempted by it. And yet when I reach home I am always sorry I didn't buy some. It comes in so usefully for little gifts at Christmas."

She caught at the first subject which suggested itself. She wanted to reflect a moment, and see how best to treat the situation.

"What took you to St. Stephen's?" he asked, abruptly, a few minutes later, ignoring her attempt to compare the Opera-house, which they were passing, with that in Paris.

"I had never been there. It was simply the idea to go."

"Was it any recollection of what I said to you in Rome?"

"About what? I don't remember," she said, boldly —finding no refuge from his questions but in mendacity.

"About an experience of my own."

"Ah, yes; it seems to me that I recall—"

"I thought you would."

"Why? I don't pay much attention to people's experiences as a rule."

"So I supposed. And yet that day—"

"You thought my feminine curiosity was roused. Well, it wasn't."

"I was not going to say curiosity. The word I had chosen was—but perhaps it is useless to say it. You've always been rather baffling to me. You seem as if you were going to be one thing, but you become another. One looks in you for depths—"

"And finds only shallows. Thanks."

"No; but one runs upon a rock."

"But there are charts, you know. A good sailor avoids a dangerous coast."

"No; a good sailor learns how to sail along a dangerous coast without making shipwreck."

"And your own seamanship is excellent, no doubt."

"When I see breakers ahead I take warning."

"What does that mean?"

"That I should never presume upon your kindness. I should know that you had many punishments for that offence."

"I could inflict a punishment, perhaps; but in your case I should find it hard to detect the crime."

"That's kindly put. But we're coming to the Bristol. Shall we walk up the Ring-Strasse a bit? Or are you tired?"

"No; I'm not tired. I shall be glad of the walk. I will go as far as the Albertina."

They turned into the Opernring, and for a minute or two walked side by side in silence. Petrina was the first to speak.

"What was the word you declined to use just now?"

"You mean what is the quality I thought I had wakened in you in Rome. Sympathy."

"For whom?"

"For me."

"For what?"

"I think you know."

"When a man and a woman have made an unhappy

marriage," said Petrina, distinctly, "my sympathy is first for her."

"But secondly for him."

"Perhaps."

"I should never ask more than that."

"I scarcely know whether you are exacting or easily satisfied."

"I am both."

"In any case I should like to say, what I haven't said yet, that I am extremely touched by your solicitude on my behalf. I want to thank you for it."

"With a request not to do it again."

Petrina colored, but laughed.

"It doesn't make my gratitude the less sincere if I remind you that, situated as I am, anything unusual is sure to bring unpleasant remark upon me."

"You were not afraid of the unusual a few years ago."

"Nor am I now; but, as things are, I am obliged to be very careful."

"Being careful won't make any difference. There are circumstances under which you will appear guilty, no matter how innocent you are."

"I will turn back now," said Petrina, with a deeper color. She was troubled by his presence, even though she enjoyed the short relief from solitude. She was mystified by his words, even though she was sorry when he said good-bye. He did not ask the length of her stay in Vienna, nor inquire in which direction she meant to go afterwards. He left her as though it were understood that, wherever she went, they should meet again.

But before returning to her rooms Petrina sent an urgent telegram to Emilia de Bohun, begging to be allowed to come to her without more delay.

CHAPTER V

IT was May again in England.

On the terrace at Orpington Park, Petrina, leaning back in her wicker garden-chair, was finding repose for her tired spirit in the peace of the embowered country. She had arrived from Vienna on the previous evening, and, though it was now afternoon, she had left her room for the first time that day. Emmy had forced her to rest after the long and rapid journey.

The servants had arranged the tea-table under the shadow of the great yew-tree. Petrina was waiting for her hostess, who was reading to little Humphrey at the other end of the terrace. The soft afternoon light made the mists hanging over the landscape golden. The hawthorn was coming into flower, and the air was filled with the delicate odors of spring.

Petrina thought of Faneuil Hill, where the wooded mountains were now just growing green. She wondered at herself for having none of her usual spring longing for New Hampshire. She thought of Vassall, and wondered at herself still more. He had faded from her life. It was almost as if she had never known him. Even the aching resentment with which she had preserved his memory was nearly gone.

"My marriage to him," she said, with an indefinable smile, "was like one of those friendships formed at sea—very intimate while the voyage lasts, but ended before one has had time to say good-bye."

She was surprised at it. She was surprised at



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THE NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY WAS THE SENSATION OF THE SOCIAL SEASON.

herself. She could not understand her own indifference.

"It must be that I am heartless," she went on, musingly. "My affections must be 'writ in water,' like Keats's name."

The memories of the Villa d'Este and Vienna were very vivid, while those in which Vassall played a part were faint and far away. Her life in Boston was indistinct to her, as though seen across a haze of years. Considering how she had suffered while her troubles had lasted, it was almost humiliating to have ceased to feel so soon.

"How different it has been with Emmy!" she continued to herself. "Divorce has drawn her nearer to Humphrey rather than farther away. She has become a model mother, and goes to church every day. Who would ever have thought it?"

Lady de Bohun handed her little boy over to his maid and came to make the tea. Petrina watched her as she advanced, noting that her hair was growing gray and that the pretty, wistful face had quite lost its youthfulness.

"But she has a charm which age will not take away," Petrina commented. "And the fact that she is indifferent to it makes it only the more likely to last."

"How good it is to see you there!" Lady de Bohun cried, as she came nearer. "I am only now beginning to feel that you have really come. I'm so glad you didn't wait at Vienna, after you found that you were free."

"You don't know what it means to me, Emmy dear, to have had this house as a refuge."

"A refuge from what, Petrina?" Lady de Bohun asked, as she began to busy herself with the tea things.

"Oh, from everything—from travel, and hotels, and *ennui*, and from myself most of all."

"Don't you find that in your position and mine one has moments of rather pitiful retrospection? Aren't you always asking yourself whether or not it was worth while?"

"I don't think so. If it was to do again—"

"You'd do it?"

"Wouldn't you?"

"There are so many inconveniences," said Lady de Bohun, as she handed Petrina her cup. "Since I've been free I haven't been able to find myself, so to speak. I keep referring things mentally to Humphrey, as if he were still here."

"By-the-way, how *is* Humphrey?"

"He's well, I think. But, O Petrina! he's so changed; you wouldn't know him. Gentian watches him like a cat watching a mouse, and he quails before her like a mouse watching a cat. Of course it's a comfort to me, because I know how much it makes him regret me and my loose rein."

"There are no Hetty Viennes any more, then?"

"Not the ghost of one. Humphrey's a reformed man. He's not nearly so smart, either. His spirit seems broken, poor old boy!"

"And Gentian?"

"Right on the mounting wave. She'll arrive one of these days; but she has worked hard for her place."

"Did people treat her kindly?"

"Not at first. You see their marriage having taken place in America, they didn't know about it over here. When invitations came for Lady de Bohun, they were meant for me but went to Gentian. She turned up in houses where I was expected, and had all the humiliation of the explanation and of being an unwelcome guest. The mistakes during the first season were sim-

ply farcical. But all that is over now, and she is very well received."

"And how do you feel about it, Emmy?"

"I? I don't feel at all. I've got beyond that point. But I've had my eyes opened."

"To what?" There was more earnestness in Petrina's question than she showed.

"To the position of women who divorce their husbands."

"Ah!"

"There is a great deal of misapprehension on the subject among those who haven't done it."

"It would naturally interest me to hear in what respect."

"In divorce, as a matter of theory, there is a clear distinction between the innocent and the guilty wife."

"Of course."

"But as a matter of practice there is none. The world knows nothing about our rights and wrongs. Even where it does know, it doesn't care or it doesn't remember. It sees a woman who had a husband going about without one. It is only an occasional just man here and there who stops to ask why. It is all the same to the mass of the people we meet. In any case, the woman has committed the worst of sins—she has created scandal and taken the public as the confidant of her troubles. For that there is no pardon, even when there is discrimination. Take the instance of Gentian and myself. In equity my position is better than hers. In society hers is better than mine. I will go further still. She *has* a position. I have none at all. She is Humphrey's wife; while I am nobody. If it were not for the children I might as well take my maiden name."

"Are you sure you are not exaggerating, Emmy

dear?" Petrina was a little frightened at the new view which was thus presented to her.

"It would be hard to exaggerate what I've been through. I've mingled my drink with weeping many a time, though it's all past now, and I begin to accept my portion. When I say society, remember I don't mean only the general assembly of the first-born in London. I mean the world at large—the people one comes in contact with anywhere and anyhow. In what light do you suppose they regard me? Why, as Humphrey de Bohun's discarded wife; as the woman who sinned against him in some vague, unexplained way, but sufficiently to enable him to be rid of her. I admit that now and then some one does take the trouble to learn or to recollect the truth; but for the majority, especially for the people whom I used to care most for, I'm a cast-off. Gentian isn't merely Humphrey's second wife. She is a good and virtuous woman who reigns in my stead."

"But, Emmy, why did you give up Humphrey, when you really cared for him?"

"I'm surprised at you, Petrina," Lady de Bohun cried, with a hard laugh. "Isn't the answer to that question self-evident? Because I was a fool. Because I thought I knew my world, when I knew nothing at all about it. Because I thought I had sounded my own heart, when I hadn't skimmed its surface. Because I took society at its word, when it is the very last guarantee I should have accepted. Because I didn't know that in England, where marriage is the question, we can be mighty in speech, but must be very conventional in action. Because, in short, Petrina dear, I've been a foolish person among foolish people—a people who have taught themselves with lies, and perverted their minds by paradox, and fed their souls on ashes;

who have confused what is simple, and corrupted what is natural, and believed that anything could be right but to do good, or be good, or to care for the wholesome and the sane."

"So you are reforming as well as Humphrey?"

"Humphrey and I are beginning to find out that we have souls. It seems an absurd discovery to make at our time of life, but it has come upon us unawares."

"I should think it might be rather uncomfortable."

"It is worse than that, for we find that, while having souls, no man careth for them. It really isn't a world in which to educate an immortal spirit. I feel that keenly. As I look back it seems as if life had been organized to puzzle and befool a simple creature like me, until I've completely lost the thread of it. If to-day I find myself side-tracked, in a ridiculous position, a wife yet not a wife, it isn't all my fault. I've been misled by people who insist on the right of a woman to release herself, and yet turn their backs upon her if she does it. I've been misled by law-givers who encourage you to do the thing by making it so easy, but who can offer you no position or protection when it is done. I've been misled by a Church which has either not the courage or the conviction to speak boldly, and say that marriage must be either this or that, but leaves you to find your own way, and frowns on you when you have taken it. The whole subject of marriage is in chaos; and I'm the victim of present-day confusion. But it has taught me this, that there is only one safe condition for a woman."

"And what is that?"

"To be either single, married, or a widow. To be divorced is nothing at all. For a free woman with a husband, or a free man with a wife, there is no place. Society isn't organized to receive them. Their footing

is uncertain; and in human society, when once your footing is uncertain, you are as good as lost."

Petrina flushed and moved uneasily in her chair.

"Oh, I'm not saying that for you, dear," Emilia hastened to explain. "You're cleverer than I, and you'll be able, no doubt, to carry it off. I'm a coward at heart, you know. When I was met with a stare or a snub or a word that had two meanings I could do nothing but run off and hide in the country. Besides, I didn't care. I had lost heart for the world. I was happier here in peace with my baby. But I'm not contented. I protest against the whole thing. That's why I go to church every day. Personally, the growth in grace doesn't justify the effort; but I am crying out for deliverance from a confused and confusing state of things, which is bringing us all into a condition of folly and disorder."

Lady de Bohun leaned forward in her garden-chair and seemed to expect from Petrina something in the way of a rejoinder. But nothing came. Petrina was thinking of Lechmere's words in Vienna: "Being careful won't make any difference. There are circumstances under which you will appear guilty, no matter how innocent you are." Was this what he meant? Did he, with his knowledge of the world, foresee that her experience would be in the order of that which Emmy had just described? Petrina shuddered. She had not expected that, outside of Boston and its prejudices, society could look askance at *her;* and the thought was not to be borne easily.

"What should I do if that were true?" she asked herself.

"There is only one course for a woman who has divorced a husband," Lady de Bohun began, as if in answer to Petrina's thought. "It is to marry again. Better any kind of man than none. A single woman

may stay single; a widow may prefer a state of widowhood; but the divorced woman must go on; she must put herself beyond criticism. As soon as she has lost one man's protection she must get under another's."

"And if she doesn't?"

"Then so much the worse for her. She must either go and be buried alive like me, or she must live in a world that has shut its heart and loosened its tongue against her."

"But you haven't married, Emmy. You could have done so if you had chosen."

"And could do so still, thank God. There have been times when I've been tempted to do it, just to have a name and a place once more among men. But the children don't like Gerald, and I'm not perfectly sure that I care enough for him myself."

"He is still waiting then?"

"Yes; and I think he enjoys it. He's old enough to know that anticipation is better than reality. That keeps him patient."

"And don't you mean to accept him one day?"

"I don't think Humphrey would like it."

"But Humphrey has married, himself."

"Inadvertently. He never would have done it if he had given himself time to consult me."

"But would you consult him?"

"Why, certainly, Petrina. For what sort of a woman do you take me?"

Petrina smiled, but said nothing. When she broke the silence it was timidly.

"You hear from your mother, of course?"

"Yes, poor dear old lady. She bears up wonderfully, considering everything."

"And," Petrina began with greater hesitation, "Harry writes sometimes, I suppose?"

"Sometimes; not often. He is buried in business."

"Does he ever speak of—of—me?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I want to know."

"Do you wish me to tell you the exact truth?"

"Certainly."

"Then he never speaks of you?"

"Never?"

"Never."

This was not the answer Petrina had expected. To her surprise it fell on her like another blow. She believed she had forgotten him, but it was incredible that he should have forgotten her. She felt vaguely that it was something else to treasure up against him. To conceal her agitation she leaned forward and placed her empty cup upon the table. Emmy's eyes, she knew, were on her, and she felt the necessity for being bolder.

"He will marry some day, I suppose," she ventured.

"Probably," Lady de Bohun returned. "And you too."

"Probably," Petrina assented, laconically, and then without knowing why, blushed hotly.

"I think you said you had seen Mr. Lechmere in Vienna," Lady de Bohun went on, pitilessly.

"Once," Petrina assented.

"Only once?"

"Certainly, Emmy. Why should you question me?"

"Don't be angry, dear. I had no motive. What did you think I meant? I only happened to remember that he had rented Oldbarns from Gerald Bertie—the pretty cottage, you know, on the outskirts of Keston Park."

"Then he is coming back to England?"

"If he isn't already here."

"And what about his wife?" Petrina had regained her self-possession and spoke easily.

"I've been told she has altogether lost her voice. She was hissed in St. Petersburg a year or more ago, and since then, I believe, she hasn't been singing anywhere. She has been ill, too, and when I last heard of her had lost most of her beauty. She is the sort of gypsy creature to be on the top of renown to-day and down in the mire to-morrow. Poor Felicia! She will be sorry one day not to have gone back to Dick when he would have taken her."

"Wouldn't he do so still?"

"Who could ever tell with a man like him? His is one of those natures that are deep but unstable; generous but cruel; impressionable, impulsive, romantic, poetic, but no better to depend on than a child's."

"I remember mamma describing him as a Vandyke Charles the First with all the virtues the Royalists loved and all the weaknesses the Puritans hated."

"Which strikes me as rather just. Dick is at once consistent and contradictory. There is something in him of the monk and something of the man of the world, and yet not enough of either to make him the one or the other. The spiritual and the carnal in him balance each other, not in the way of a nicely adjusted poise, but in a see-saw fashion which gives the domination to each in turn. If he were not so sane he would be mad; and I sometimes ask myself if he isn't."

"Mr. Lechmere," said a footman, who had stepped silently over the lawn.

"Lord save us!" cried Lady de Bohun with a start. "There's something uncanny in a man's arriving so patly as that."

Petrina sat in motionless tension, straining to keep her self-command. Emilia rose and went forward to

meet Lechmere. During the minute or two in which they stood exchanging greetings Petrina got herself in hand. When Lechmere and Lady de Bohun turned round to where she was sitting she was able to receive him with a semblance of that good-natured welcome which means nothing.

"I've come to take possession of my hut at Oldbarns," he said when they were seated. "I arrived from Vienna yesterday. But this afternoon I am here in the capacity of herald. I have to announce visitors more honorable and more important than I."

"Explain yourself," Lady de Bohun demanded. "Few come nowadays to darken these poor doors. I expect that tea is cold."

"It is hot enough, thanks," said Lechmere, taking his cup of tea and tasting it. "As I was driving through Keston Park I passed a landau full of ladies and gentlemen, who hailed me. They were the Duchess of Ambleside, Lady Yorkshire, Gerald Bertie, and Taddles. They told me they were coming here."

"Dick, if you love me," Lady de Bohun cried, tragically, "go and meet them in the avenue and tell them I am dead. Tell them we have measles in the house. Tell them anything to keep them out."

"Who is Taddles?" Petrina asked.

"Taddles," Lady de Bohun explained, "is the Duchess's name for Amos. She called him at first the Yorkshire Terrier; you can guess why. Now she has nicknamed him Taddles."

"A name which seems to suit that kind of dog," Lechmere remarked.

"Or man," added Lady de Bohun. "But if they're really coming I must run in and kill the fatted calf, in the way of ordering more biscuits and tea. Excuse me just a minute."

"What a rapid traveller you are," Lechmere said when he and Petrina were alone.

"I may say the same of you."

"I had to keep your pace. I told you I was not going to lose sight of you until you were at the end of your wanderings."

"Thank you for your kindness," said Petrina, trying to take a light tone. "But you see that I am out of all peril now. I had no idea that it was so unsafe for a woman to travel alone."

"One imagines dangers where one—cares much."

"There!" Lady de Bohun cried, returning to her place. "They may not be welcome, but at least they shall not go empty away."

She had scarcely seated herself when voices were heard from the house, and the Duchess, followed by the other three, bustled out without waiting for the footman to announce her.

"My poor dear!" she called, in her gurgling voice, as, with both hands outstretched, she crossed the lawn towards Lady de Bohun, who was advancing to meet her. "My poor dear!" she repeated as she took Emilia's hands. "To think that you're living, after all! It is quite affecting."

"I feel it so, Duchess," Emilia laughed. "I never expected to see you in this world again—nor you, Lady Yorkshire—nor you, Mr. Amos. It is so kind of you all to come and see me in my tomb. How do you do, Gerald? Take the Duchess over to the yew-tree. You'll find some chairs and some old friends there."

"We're staying at Keston Castle," Lady Yorkshire said, languidly. "When Major Bertie told us at lunch that you were in this neighborhood we thought we should like to see you."

"And for me to see *you* is like a glimpse of the upper world to a soul in nether Tartarus."

"Or in Paradise," suggested Amos, with a glance down the terraced gardens.

"Yes, a Paradise near town," Lady Yorkshire said, as they moved slowly towards the tea-table. "That is so much more convenient than one in the other world."

"The world into which you supposed me to have gone," Lady de Bohun laughed, good-naturedly.

"We knew you were one whom the gods loved," Amos drawled. "It didn't seem strange, therefore, that you should have died young."

"Come here," the Duchess called, from under the yew-tree. "Here is Miss Faneuil, that charming American."

"And the Duchess of Ambleside, that delicious Englishwoman," Lechmere added.

"And a certain Lechmere, who is neither fish nor fowl nor good red-herring," the Duchess rejoined, with a big, jovial laugh.

"How do you?" Lady Yorkshire held out her hand to Petrina, and spoke in a tired voice. "I haven't seen you for a long time."

"Did you think she was dead, too?" Lady de Bohun inquired, as she took her place at the tea-table.

"Not to see Lady Yorkshire is always death," Bertie remarked, as he arranged the chairs for the ladies.

"That's sarcasm," said the Duchess, sitting down beside Petrina.

"Lady Yorkshire doesn't think so, I'm sure," protested Bertie.

"Nor does Amos," Lechmere added, taking a cup from Lady de Bohun's hand and passing it to the Duchess.

"And how is Mr. Vassall?" her grace asked, turn-

ing suddenly to Petrina. "Couldn't I get him to come down to Groombridge next week?—you, too, if you wanted to come."

"Thanks, Duchess, but I'm otherwise engaged," Petrina answered, with an effort not to seem embarrassed.

"But he isn't, I hope," the Duchess pursued. "I should love to have him. I never could see enough of him when he was last here. He seemed to fight shy of me. Perhaps he thought I wasn't in earnest."

"No man could ever have done you that injustice, Duchess," Lady Yorkshire remarked, with a grave suavity.

"Do tell him I want him," the Duchess went on to Petrina. "Is he in the house? Send some one to fetch him."

"He's in America," Petrina answered, quietly.

"America!" the Duchess cried. "Then what are you doing here? Do you think it safe to leave him all alone? I shouldn't, if my husband had such an interesting face. I remember his face especially. Has he got it still?"

"He had when I last saw him."

"He was *so* good-looking; not a bit like an American."

"But, Duchess," said Bertie, "Mr. Amos is an American, and he's a Belvedere Apollo. Isn't he, Lady Yorkshire?"

"Oh, Taddles!" cried the Duchess, scornfully. "He's only an American by accident. He has so much of the blood of a certain people famous in the Bible and finance that he has the advantage of us all in antiquity of race."

"I'm afraid, Duchess," said Amos, with a dark flush,

"that my relations in that direction are less intimate than your own."

"Oh, you mean the money-lenders," the Duchess admitted, frankly. "Yes, you can always have me there, worse luck. I've no reply to make to that shot, except to say that if there were no spendthrift Gentiles there wouldn't be any wealthy Jews. Would there, Agneta?"

"Would there what?" Lady Yorkshire affected not to have heard, though she too had flushed at the allusion to the origin of Amos's riches.

"Nothing, nothing," said the Duchess, who turned again to Petrina. "But do tell me about Mr. Vassall, Miss Faneuil. When do you expect him? He will surely be here for some part of the season. You won't let him come without telling me? That would be cruel. I see his face still—such a nice, serious, ascetic face—so different from Ambleside's. Does he never ask about me when he writes? There was a time when I was beginning to think that his coldness showed signs of melting; but just then you whipped him away. Women are so jealous, even when there's only the slightest cause. Not but that I think you're right, with such a good-looking husband— What?"

The Duchess had turned with this sudden question to Bertie, who, passing among the company with cakes and biscuits, had stooped and whispered something into the Duchess's ear.

"What?" her grace repeated, sharply. "Don't say anything about who? I didn't catch it. Divorced, did you say? Who's divorced? Don't say 'sh—' to me now. I want to know who's divorced. Surely not Miss Faneuil—and from that delightful man!"

"Yes, duchess," Petrina said, with dignity. "Mr. Vassall and I are divorced. Please do not discuss the subject further."

"Of course not, my dear," the Duchess cried, sympathetically. "No one with any delicacy would do so. But I'm so sorry for you, poor thing! What a dreadfully equivocal situation it puts you in! Did he do anything bad? Did he—" And here the Duchess leaned forward and finished her question in a whisper. "No?" she continued, with a look of surprise, as Petrina shook her head. "He didn't? Are you sure? You can't be quite sure. He might have done so without your knowing it, and it's just as well to hang a man for a sheep as a lamb, while you are about it. It was years after I first began to suspect Ambleside before I learned that I was right. And such a good-looking man, too—I mean Mr. Vassall. Why, you were scarcely married, now I come to think of it. But you do things so quickly in America. It would never do in this country, would it, Agneta? If you and Yorkshire divorced each other for every little thing—"

"Or you and the Duke," interposed Lady Yorkshire.

"Or the Duke and I, as you so justly observe—why, where should we be? Not but what I've been tempted to do it, many and many a time. It was my brother Jack—the archbishop, you know—who held me back. He's so wise, Jack is. I suppose that's why they made him an archbishop. He said I should simply be cutting my own throat, and be putting myself in an equivocal situation for nothing. No one will receive you, he said, even if you're in the right. If they have you at their houses it will only be as a kind of show, so that the men may talk about you in the smoking-room, and that the women may watch you when you're present and tattle about you when your back is turned. I must say I never realized before what it was to have clergy in the family. I'm sure we do them a great injustice—the

clergy. They look as if they couldn't say boo to a goose, and yet when it comes to a question of divorce—"

"You find they can," Lady de Bohun interposed, maliciously.

"Precisely," agreed the Duchess. "That's what I did find. Jack held me back with both hands, and gave me the most convincing of illustrations. 'Look at Mrs. Vyner,' he said, 'and Lady Susan Polehampton, and Lady Staines, and ever so many others—perfectly innocent women, all of them—and yet to-day they are driven to do church-work in order to keep any kind of respectable position in the world. The most charitable consider their situation as equivocal,' Jack says, and he must know. So I bore my sorrows—"

"And the Duke bore his," said Bertie, with a significant glance around.

"But, oh, dear," sighed the Duchess, mournfully, "broken vows! We know all about them, don't we, Agneta?"

"You seem to, Duchess," Lady Yorkshire replied, with unnecessary tartness.

"I do, indeed," the Duchess admitted. "I suppose we all do—unless it's you, Major Bertie. You never took any."

"Nor I," said Amos.

"No, I forgot you, Taddles. You did without them, didn't he, Agneta? So, I suppose, that's why he didn't come over with you," she continued, turning once more towards Petrina. "It wouldn't do now, would it? You can go far with a man if you're not married to him at all; but once you're divorced it's hopeless. And you won't come to town, either. Oh no, my dear," she went on, in answer to a protesting expression in Petrina's eyes. "You couldn't. You'd find your situation too equivocal. You wouldn't be comfortable.

People would be afraid of having you. Better do like her" (she nodded in the direction of Lady de Bohun), "and stay where people can't say the nasty things about you that they'll want to say. As to her, when she divorced Humphrey her character went like tissue-paper in a blaze; there wasn't even ashes left behind. That's why she has kept down here in the country. By-the-way, dear," the Duchess continued, looking over at Lady de Bohun, "did I tell you that I dined at your sister-in-law's the other night?"

"At my—?"

"Sister-in-law's, I said, though I am not sufficiently well up in your American terms to know if that's the exact relationship. I mean Humphrey's other wife. She's a dear, isn't she? Such pretty eyes, and a complexion—well, you'd swear it was made up. But that you can't tell. They say the same thing about Agneta's; and yet every one knows that it's as natural as grass. Well, Gerald, I suppose you're waiting for me to give the sign to go. I see you're impatient to get back to Keston."

"I fancy Lady de Bohun won't be sorry to see the last of us."

"On the contrary, Gerald, I've been extremely diverted; and I'm sure Petrina has, too."

"Thanks to the Duchess," Petrina assented, as they all rose.

"And don't forget Lady Yorkshire and Taddles," said her grace, trying to catch the floating end of her boa. "They are always as interesting as a French comedy. That's why I go about with them. Well, good-bye, dears," she went on, holding out one hand to Emilia and the other to Petrina. "When I see you as you are—in your equivocal situations—I am thankful to have taken Jack's advice. Good-bye; good-bye.

I am so happy to have seen you both. Dear knows when we shall ever meet again. My brother being an archbishop, you know, obliges me to be most careful."

Lechmere saw the party to their landau, and when the sound of wheels had died away Petrina and Emilia stood looking at each other in amazement. Then they burst into a ringing peal of laughter. But in their laughter there was something nervous, hysterical, and very near to tears.

CHAPTER VI

PETRINA did go to town that season, in spite of the Duchess's advice. There were reasons which seemed to make it the only thing to do. First, her visit to Orpington Park was not altogether a happy one. It was clear that Emmy was tending in one direction, and she herself in another. As Petrina expressed it, Emmy was showing that, after all, she was a Vassall; she was reverting to early beliefs and practices, and beginning to be "narrow." She went every day to see Hippolyta in her convent at Bishop's Orpington, and came home with what Petrina thought a ridiculous admiration for the religious life. She fell into a habit of speaking of her former ideas as "wrong"; implying that Petrina, who held those ideas still, remained in error. Between them there was no falling off in affection; but there was that failure of sympathy which comes between friends when one and not the other has changed his point of view.

Then Petrina went to town, because she would not allow the Duchess of Ambleside's opinion to pass unchallenged. She took her grace's words as expressive of the social attitude she must expect to face; but she would not be frightened by it beforehand. "I am a perfectly innocent woman," she insisted. "No one has a right to cast suspicion on my name."

And, as far as she ever knew, none was cast. She experienced no discourtesy in London; she met with no rebuff; she was only let alone. Her English ac-

quaintances learned of her divorce, and showed no surprise. They said it was "American," and let it pass; but they ceased to show their former friendship for Petrina. Some, who had admired her as a girl, acknowledged that they had always thought her queer; others who had liked her owned that they were disappointed. The majority considered her "mysterious"; her manner of appearing and disappearing, they said, was strange; she turned up from nobody knew where, now with a husband, and now with none; it was therefore wiser to be on the negative safe-side in the way of intimacy. They greeted her kindly when they met by accident; but it was only by accident that they met.

The perception of this came to Petrina quickly. When Sir Humphrey and Gentian invited her from Saturday to Monday to their little place in Herts she found herself the only guest. When she dined with them in town no one was asked to meet her but Gentian's father. Petrina understood at once. She was being kept out of sight of Gentian's friends. She could almost hear Gentian saying that her own footing was too insecure to allow of her giving public recognition to any one whose position could be questioned. Princess Hans of Markenstein was effusively cordial; but when Petrina lunched at Markenstein House she noticed that her fellow-guests had been carefully chosen among those who live in glass houses, and therefore could not be particular or throw stones. These were Petrina's social attentions. They were given from necessity, as if to a poor relation, and were kept for intimate occasions. Neither Gentian nor Princess Hans failed in protestations of friendship; but their hospitality was never repeated.

From the rest of the world there came nothing. Petrina knew that she was not even talked about. She

was gently ignored. The Duchess of Ambleside shook hands with her one day in Bond Street, and was sympathetic; but she did not send a card for her garden party at Ambleside House. Lady Yorkshire nodded to her once or twice, but went no further. Even Sir George Wallingford was politely circumspect, as though he was afraid of being compromised.

And so, as June wore on, Petrina knew that in London, as in Boston, she had lost the air of importance she had hitherto carried with her. There was no movement against her. There was no attempt to treat her as one who has shocked the proprieties. There was only a silent refusal to consider her as of that inner social group to which she had once belonged. She was not made the object of gossip; she was simply left out.

"They look upon me as second-rate," she said to herself one day, when the realization came upon her. "I! I! Petrina Faneuil! Second-rate!" She tingled with shame. No moral accusation could have brought her down with such humiliation.

But she had used the word of herself; no one else had ever applied it to her. It had come into her own mind as descriptive of her own condition. There was self-judgment in the very fact. That was her next thought, and it terrified her.

"Can it be true?" she went on, in frightened self-examination. "Is it possible that I am deteriorating? Do others see in me a debasement of tone to which I am insensible?"

She questioned herself relentlessly, but could find no reply, save in the blandly indifferent attitude of all the world towards her. It was indifference so courteous that she could not even complain of it. It was the indifference which sees and yet overlooks, and which is therefore not unintentional.

Petrina carried herself quietly, and remained at the Carlton House Hotel. She affected to perceive no change in the bearing of her acquaintances towards her; but she went no more among them. If she did not leave London, it was because she did not know where to go. She thought of the country, but it repelled her; of the Continent, but it appalled her; of Faneuil Hill, but her whole spirit cried out, "Not there!" "Where then?" she asked; but though the world was all before her where to choose, it offered her no spot which she could call a refuge. So she stayed on at the Carlton House Hotel, watching that life of London from which she had been edged out, and wondering, as she had so often wondered before, why, of all women in the world, this fate should have overtaken her.

Just then Lechmere came to town. From his retreat at Oldbarns he had followed Petrina's course in London. Her experience had been what he had expected; he could have predicted it; he had been over this road before. Skilfully and unobtrusively he set himself to bring balm for her wounded pride and tonic for her hard-hit self-respect. He did not try to fight her battles; he attempted only to console her in defeat. He showed her that she was but one against the world; that, though she had thrown the challenge, the contest was unequal, and that she must go down. At the same time he made it plain that his strength was at her service.

Petrina was touched. In the weeks that followed he softened what was hard, and cheered what was lonely, and sweetened what was bitter in her lot. He surrounded her with so much kindness that she almost ceased to feel that the world outside was cruel. He stood between her and whatever could hurt her, and did it so unostentatiously that she could not take alarm.

She no longer felt the impulse to escape from him, as she had at Rome and afterwards at Vienna. She knew he did not love her, but she could not turn away from the help he brought her. Her life had become too bleak.

Thus the intimacy begun at Tivoli and developed in Rome ripened in London. Petrina allowed Lechmere to see much of her. When her conscience asked her if this was wise, she had only to reply that there was no one beyond themselves to consider. The prudence she had tried at first to maintain had profited her nothing; she would, therefore, be less strict in its observance. She would not be indiscreet, but she would be independent. She would ignore the opinions of those who had ignored her rights. She would dispense with a society which had hinted that it could dispense with her. She would not take life tragically, in spite of all she had to suffer; rather she would look about her and see what was left to enjoy.

"Are you going to spend another dull Sunday in town?" Lechmere asked, late one Saturday night. "Why not do something?"

"I can't very well go punting all alone on the river," Petrina laughed, "or even spend the day at Hampton Court."

"I have an idea."

"That's good. Be sure you keep it."

"Why shouldn't we go off for the day together?"

"For a number of reasons unnecessary to give in detail. But if it isn't very far—"

"Which it isn't."

"And doesn't involve going in a boat—"

"Which it doesn't."

"Then I'm willing to think it over."

"And if your decision is affirmative, be ready for me

when I come to take you to the ten-thirty train from Waterloo."

"I'm sure it's Hampton Court. I won't go."

"It isn't near Hampton Court, and you must go."

Petrina did go. The invitation caught her in a reckless moment. She remembered their day at Tivoli and their drives about Rome. She would throw propriety to the winds, and have one good day in England. London was hateful to her; its Sundays drove her to despair. She would go at all costs.

When Lechmere came in the morning she was waiting.

CHAPTER VII

"STOP at Queen Adelaide's Tree," said Lechmere to the coachman, as they turned from the dusty highway into Windsor Forest.

"What a magic wood! How beautiful it is!"

Petrina drew a deep breath of pleasure. As they drove beneath the shade of the huge secular oaks, it was as if they had gone into another world. The spell of the forest fell instantly upon them. Life grew more elemental. Boston, London, Rome—even Ascot, where they had lunched—suddenly became unreal, as the world must become to the soul that has just passed beyond it. On they went under the oaks and amid the breast-high bracken, as through an enchanted land where the very dreams of poetry might come true. It was early afternoon. The air was still. There was no sound but that of the occasional flitting of a bird from tree to tree. Here and there rays of light struggled through the overarching boughs, and played amid the giant trunks like wood-nymphs clad in sunbeams. In the deep, successive glades there was a sense of mystery—the mystery of ages and of calm—the mystery in which there is no passion, but only a patient, timeless waiting upon God. Petrina was conscious of something soothing in the spot, of something consoling and caressing, as if Nature were holding out hands to her spirit and folding it in peace.

"How beautiful!" she murmured again, as they went deeper into the hoary wood.

Suddenly the carriage stopped.

"Look," said Lechmere, as he pointed to the north.

Petrina uttered a light cry.

Through a great oval opening in the forest, and across miles of undulating park-land, Windsor Castle detached itself softly from the sun-shot summer haze. At this distance it seemed to emerge from cloud and to rest on cloud. Golden mists blotted out the little town nestling around the ramparts, and flung a translucent veil over the valley of the Thames. The towered and battlemented pile—palace, fortress, and church—was less like an earthly building than a city which had come down out of heaven from God.

"I never knew there was anything so beautiful in England," Petrina said, when she had looked long at the picture in its oval frame of green. "It is like a Turner."

"I thought it would please you," Lechmere responded. "I have often wished to bring you here. The Prince Consort cut the vista, I believe. Wouldn't you like to get out? There is a seat here."

They descended from the carriage and sat down on the rustic bench at the foot of Queen Adelaide's Tree. The coachman drove on to rest his horses in a spot of deeper shade. They were quite alone.

"This peace is wonderful," Petrina remarked, when they had been silent a long time. "There is something healing in it."

"And something that rebukes our stress and worry and anxiety. Don't you think so? I am fond of this forest. It keeps the traditions of the ancient wood. It isn't a trim palace-park like the forest of St. Germain, nor a bigger Bois de Boulogne like that of Fontainebleau. This is a spot where primitive creatures not quite human might still lurk, watching modern time

go by. Dryads might be flitting behind those great trunks, or a procession of Druids might be passing on to offer a victim at a sacred tree."

"Or a train of Arthur's knights might ride down through the bracken on their way to Camelot; or Galahad looking in every stray sunbeam for a glimpse of the Holy Grail; or Lancelot and Guinevere, making the most of an hour together."

"We came here often," said Lechmere, in a quiet tone, "when we lived near Windsor. Felicia liked this spot. She used to say that to be here was like living in an old engraving."

Petrina felt her heart give a great bound. It was the first time he had ever spoken of his wife. She knew now that he wished to do so, and replied with simple directness like his own.

"Then the place has associations for you? I wonder that you care to come back to it with anybody else."

"I shouldn't do so with any one but you."

"Where did you live?"

"Over there beyond St. Leonard's Hill."

"You liked the neighborhood?"

"The setting suited the jewel. I can't say more than that."

"No; because when you say that you say all."

"I see you understand. Of course I knew you did. Most people think I have been a fool."

"I never should."

"I know that, too. We were made to console each other."

"I am not sure that I need consolation," Petrina said, more coldly.

"Oh yes, you do. I know you better than you think. Ever since we first met at Faneuil Hill, before you were married, I felt that we were not going to be mere ordi-

nary friends. I didn't understand it just then. I never understood it till the afternoon when I saw you in the church in Vienna. It came to me then in a flash. I knew it was some thought of me that had brought you there. I knew, too, that the thought was something more than sympathy. I told you I had gone through something in that church. It was only this. In Vienna I last saw Felicia. She rejected me. There was no further hope. When I left her I meant not to go on living. There's a dark streak in my nature; and at the best of times death has seemed to beckon to me. I don't know why I didn't do it at once; but I didn't. I was rather dazed. I wandered aimlessly about the streets of Vienna, as one does at such a time. Then I found myself in the church. I wasn't exactly suffering. I was too far gone for that. I was benumbed. I sat there dully and indifferently, vaguely choosing among the great narcotics. By-and-by there was a service; I don't know what. There were lights about the altar, and there was singing. Then something happened, though I can't tell you what it was. An angel spoke to me, perhaps, or perhaps God himself, seeing how great my grief was, may have come to me. In any case I was suddenly comforted. I was made to understand that the end hadn't come. I could never explain to you what it was. It was as if I had been bidden to wait. I did wait. I went to the East, as you know. When I came back I met you. I was puzzled at first. I didn't see what was to happen—not until I was led, as the Wise Men were led by the Star, to where you were sitting in the dimness of the old church. Then I knew."

"You knew what?"

"That God had given you to me."

"I am not to be disposed of by a God. That is an expression which I don't understand."

"No; but you understand the fact."

"What fact?"

"That we need each other."

"I haven't yet reached the point where I am not sufficient to myself; and you will never have any ideal but that which you have kept so long."

"Isn't it the fact that we have lost our ideals which draws you and me together? We are two desolate creatures who are looking less for love than for support. We don't seek happiness. It is too late for that. All we want is help to bear—what each of us has to carry."

"I never said so."

"It hasn't required words."

"You ought not to ascribe to me a need which I haven't felt."

"But you *have* felt it. You feel it now. When we part this evening you know that you will go back into a life whose emptiness appalls you."

"If I am alone it is because I prefer solitude," she said, with a flush.

"Why should you try to deceive me? You are an enigma to other people, but not quite to me. It is long since I began to see beneath your mask."

"I have never worn one."

"Not consciously; and yet you have always been a mystery. I was certain before your marriage that Vassall would never understand you."

"And you think you do?"

"Only after patient study, as one learns to read a foreign language."

"But it remains foreign."

"I admit that. One never quite masters the idiom. Between you and me there will always remain some-

thing which neither can comprehend. We could respect that in each other. If you became my wife I should never expect to be for you what Vassall, had he known how, might have become."

"You understand, then, that under happier circumstances he could have had my highest love?"

"And has it. I make no mistake on that point. There are reaches in your own heart which you have never explored—reaches which, I imagine, you will never explore in this life. You may enter them in another, and, if so, you will find no one but Harry Vassall there."

"And in your life?"

"There is the same."

"Then would not a marriage between us be a dangerous experiment?"

"If we were younger, yes; or if we had been less tried; or if we didn't know exactly what we were seeking; or if we couldn't both look at marriage from the reasonable latter-day point of view. In any of these cases the experiment might be rash. But with you and me there is little to be feared."

"You take my desire for granted. I resent that."

"I take for granted nothing but what I know. How well I know it I could explain if you would let me take the liberty."

Petrina gazed absently at the cloud-wrapped castle in the distance, and said nothing. Lechmere took her silence as permission to go on.

"When I heard that you were going to marry Vassall I couldn't understand it at first. It seemed to me that you two were not fitted for each other. Much as I liked him as a friend, I failed to see why you should care for him as a husband. Oh, I discovered that later," he added, quickly, as Petrina turned upon him rather haughtily. "To you he represented an ideal; and you

were right. He *is* an ideal—the ideal of whatever is simple, high-minded, and strong. When I knew him first there were in him all the elements of a Sir Philip Sidney. That is what drew me to him, and what you saw. But, unfortunately for us all, he has penned a great nature up within the limits imposed by family traditions and local self-sufficiency. He has bound up his mind, as a China-woman binds her foot, so that it might never outgrow what he learned as a boy at Harvard, or have anything more than a vague perception of a world outside of Massachusetts. To the best New England qualities he has added the most unbearable of New England faults—the tendency to be introspective and yet self-satisfied, consciously moral and yet ice-bound in mental pride. With everything right about him in disposition and principles, he has cramped himself up in that narrowest of all worlds—the world in which there is every virtue but charity. Vassall was meant for a large life, but he has so trained himself to tread a daily dogged round that now he thinks nothing worth doing but that which he does, and no one worth knowing but those whom he knows, and nothing worth caring for or believing in but that which appeals to him. He should have been a Chevalier Bayard and he has made himself a Tom Tulliver."

Petrina sat silent and motionless, the red slowly deepening in her cheek.

"And into a life like his," Lechmere pursued, "you brought your own—eager, inquisitive, daring, nervously independent, sensitively impatient of control, mocking at tradition, and irreverent towards the teachings of the past. It would be difficult to temper the shock of two such natures meeting. You must have suffered terribly—both of you. Your love must have staggered before his hardness; and his before, what he would think,

your heartlessness. Yes, you must have suffered cruelly. You were thwarted, disappointed, and humiliated. When you parted from him openly it was, for a proud woman like you, as if you had dragged out your own soul for every one to see its secrets. Now that you are quite free, your spirit feels as if it had been beaten, robbed, and left to die by the roadside, while priests, and Levites, and former friends go hastily by. Oh, I know what you feel—I know your loneliness—your wretchedness—your desolation. I could see it when we met at Tivoli. I could see it in Rome. I could see it in your objectless wandering to Vienna. I can see it, above all, here in England, where you are surrounded by those who should stand by you, and yet no one does. I know what indignation you keep down under your coldly amiable manner. I know what scalding tears you could shed if you were to let yourself cry. You are the last woman in the world to bear the fate that has overtaken you. You were meant to shine in the palace, and not to shiver at the gate. Life has been hard to you. It has poured out for you the best of its wine and then mingled it with wormwood; it has given you beauty, youth, and health, and then thrust you into a place where all are useless. But I could help you. I could bring you strength, companionship, and protection, even if I could do no more. You are so deserted, so exposed! At the very least I could stand like a breakwater between you and life, and let its waves spend their worst force on me."

"And what could I bring you?"

Petrina spoke in a trembling whisper. Great tears, which she made no attempt to hide, rolled slowly down.

"You could give me what the isle in the ocean offers the shipwrecked man—life. You and I wouldn't ask for much. We should be humble in our demands. We

have seen the futility of expecting great things. When rich men come to want they are glad to find a shelter from the storm. When exiles meet they give a refuge to each other. You and I are poor and in exile. We have met as in a desolate land and have been drawn together by sorrow. If I don't say love, it is only because, after all that you have felt on your part and I on mine, love is a word which we hesitate to use. But there is some strong tie between us. You know that as well as I. Exactly what it is we need not try to analyze or define. It is there, and that is enough. In your presence I am a broken man made whole again; in mine, I hope, you feel yourself a little comforted. Oh, Petrina, why should we hesitate? If we turn away from each other, where can we go but back into the cold and void? We have both tried that, and we know that we can't go on in it. What then? Which way are we to turn? What is to become of us? In a few days now you will be leaving London. But where are you to go? What are you to do? How are you to spend your life otherwise than in a pointless wandering? There is only one answer to your questions. It is the answer which I find to mine. There is only one refuge for us—but in it we must be together. There we could be in quiet if we liked, looking out on life as we look out on the castle over there, while we ourselves are embowered in seclusion. There we could heal our wounds, and dry our tears, and seek peace and insure it. There *is* such a refuge, Petrina. There is a life awaiting us in which we could seek just the balm for tired hearts which one seems to breathe in this old wood. Will you come with me and find it?"

Something prompted her to say no, but she would not yield to the suggestion.

"Would it be far?" she asked.

"Not far."

"Should I be strong enough?"

"Quite strong enough."

"I have grown afraid of men," she murmured. "Would you be kind to me?"

He laid his hand on hers, and the touch thrilled her with memories of Rome.

"Very kind," he whispered.

"Then I will try," she said, but as she spoke she seemed to know that she had done wrong.

Part V

CHAPTER I

PETRINA and Lechmere were married in August, and went directly to Oldbarns. It was a relief to them to find that Emilia de Bohun was at Homburg, and Gerald Bertie in the North. There were thus no witnesses to the beginning of the new experiment.

Oldbarns was a pretty place, and, though called a cottage, was large enough for dignified living. Lechmere had taken it for a year; and Petrina's first pleasure was in the feeling that she had a home. Her own house in Boston was not a home to her now. Some day, she said, she might return to it, but if so it could only be years hence, when she should be sufficiently forgotten to be able to begin again.

For the moment she was satisfied in having found a resting-place. Her plans for the past had failed to such a degree that at present her mind did not go beyond the temporary. After all that the last few years had brought her of humiliation and grief, she was glad to be soothed in country peace. At Oldbarns there were no half-estranged friends to face and no complicated problems to solve. She was no longer lonely; she was no longer a waif. She had once more a husband, a household, and duties. She had therefore anchors by which to hold, and her drifting for the time was ended.

She was pleased, moreover, to be called Mrs. Lechmere. Any title was a welcome relief from the one she had borne. Since her divorce she had hated to be known as Mrs. Vassall. She had felt that she had no right to

the name, and yet could not easily give it up. Under present conditions, she was at least out of an anomalous position. She could call herself some one; she had a definite social place. She smiled to think of the large claims she had once put forth for herself. Nothing but the best had been good enough; nothing but the highest high enough. Now she was grateful to Lechmere for making her his wife and for giving her shelter at his fireside.

He himself was courteous and considerate, but Petrina was surprised to find that, after their marriage, she knew him little better than before. As the weeks went by she began to perceive that she did not know him at all. He watched over her and saw that she had no wish which was not gratified; but in his own thought he remained apart from her. That which was intimacy in friendship seemed like distance in marriage. It was soon apparent that the Lechmere of daily life was a silent man, with an occasional inspiration to talk; a sad man, with a frequent caprice for society. The vein of mysticism in his character repelled Petrina; his tendency to melancholy frightened her. From their very wedding-day he seemed changed—as a man is changed who has waked from the dream of temptation into the reality of sin.

So, as the summer went on, Petrina began to perceive that there were limits to such consolation as she had secured. The interest Lechmere had shown in her almost ceased. He was never unkind, but he stood off from her like a stranger. The difference in his bearing was so marked that she grew uneasy. She wondered if he regretted the step they had taken together. She wondered if she regretted it herself. Here, however, she checked her meditations. She dared not dwell on that thought. For it was curious that now, when she had

put an impassable barrier between Harry Vassall and herself, he seemed to come near to her again; that now, when she had given up his name, and as far as possible erased everything that had existed between them, he was more persistently present than at any time since their separation. Now and then, as she sat in her garden, whiling away a golden September afternoon, her book fell unread into her lap, while she found herself wondering how he had received the news of her marriage, and whether it had caused him pain. Imperceptibly to herself she began to think of him with less bitterness. Now that she was another man's wife, she felt that she could judge him more impartially than before. Her marriage had removed her so far from her former life that she could pass on it the same sort of sentence which a new generation can deliver on the achievements of the last. In comparison with Lechmere's mysteriousness and reserve, she found Vassall simple and sane. There were days when Lechmere puzzled her, and she longed for Vassall's guidance.

And yet, with strange self-contradiction, she clung to Lechmere's presence. When he left her to pass long days alone, she was restless till he came back again. The tie between them was so slight that she feared its breaking. She was married to him, it was true, but they had agreed that marriage was a temporary thing, and she lived in dread of his telling her that theirs was at an end. If so she would be obliged to accept his decision, and should wander forth again, like Hagar at the word of Abraham.

"I wonder if his thoughts dwell as much on Felicia as mine do on Harry?" she asked herself one day; and the idea startled her. She had not hitherto considered Madame de Prony as other than a dead factor in Lechmere's life; but she was living, and the knowledge be-

gan to create in Petrina's mind a vague disquietude. She was not jealous; she was only afraid of being disturbed in that corner of life where her wandering feet had found rest. Among the flowers at Oldbarns and the glades of Keston Park she was not happy; for that she did not care; the thing essential was that she should be kept hidden and in peace. It terrified her to think that she might lose her refuge so soon after having found it.

In this possibility she gradually grew afraid of him. Now and then she found him watching her, not stealthily, but with that gentle, oblique regard which gave him more than ever the expression of a Vandyke Charles the First. They fell into the habit of mutual watching, as though each were trying to read what the other dared not put into words.

It was late in the autumn when Emilia returned to Orpington Park and paid her first visit to Petrina.

"Well, my dear," Lady de Bohun exclaimed, bustling unannounced one morning into the sitting-room where Petrina was sewing. "I didn't let you know I was coming, because I was afraid Dick might stay at home."

"He's out stalking through the turnip-fields, trying to shoot something," Petrina explained, when they had embraced and settled down before the fire.

"That's good. I prayed for that on the way over. I wanted to see you alone."

Petrina had dreaded this meeting, though she hardly knew why. As she looked at Emmy, in her careless, old-fashioned black dress, she saw a clearer likeness to Mrs. Vassall. Something in the way of speaking, too, reminded her of Harry.

"She will say I have been disloyal to him," she thought, as Lady de Bohun held out her cold hands to the blaze. But it was again her own self-judgment

which had found the word which on other lips she would have resented.

"Of course I have been anxious to see you, Emmy dear," Petrina said aloud. "So much has happened since we last met which hasn't been possible to explain by writing."

"I don't know that there is anything to explain," Lady de Bohun replied, slowly. "Naturally I was surprised. I had never renounced a hope that you and Harry might have made it up."

"It takes two to make a reconciliation as well as a quarrel, Emmy dear."

"And you were not willing to be one."

Petrina did not answer, and Emilia continued.

"As far as my observation goes," she remarked, thoughtfully, looking steadily into the fire, "men and women separate for the most inadequate of reasons. I am sure mine were so when I left Humphrey. If I were to be married to a dozen men I should never try again to get rid of one of them. I should let them die natural deaths, or do my best to put up with them. If I had a sermon to preach on the subject I should take the text from that very sentence. *To put up with!* There's the key-note of married life. I wonder how that verb originated, and if there's anything about it in the *Study of Words?* But it's strikingly eloquent. It ought to be engraved in every wedding-ring and every bit of wedding silver. It ought to be embroidered on every husband's phylacteries, and worn as a frontlet between every married woman's eyes."

"I don't believe it would be becoming," said Petrina, with a rather wan smile.

"That's what we women think most about nowadays —those of us who have any power to pick and choose. We go to the altar as we go to the dressmaker's, to get

something that sets us off to the best advantage. If things don't fit we don't wear them; *voilà tout.*"

"And you think it hard on the men?"

"It's hard on us all. In my own case it has been harder on me than on anybody else. Humphrey is happy enough, as far as I can see. Gentian makes him a good wife; a better one than I did, at any rate; and, oh, dear, they're going to have a baby! You didn't know that, did you? Well, they are. It's a dreadful blow to me. If I could have foreseen that when I made such a fuss, and got Humphrey to go into chambers, three years ago, I should have thought a second time. Just think of it! I shall be the creature's step-mother. I shouldn't wonder if they asked me to stand for it when it's christened. They make it a point to offer me the best of everything, as though I were a kind of queen-dowager. But it seems to me unnatural that Humphrey should be having other children when I'm still alive."

"But you may have children of your own, Emmy, if you marry Gerald Bertie."

"That's all over. I've sent him back that ridiculous ring I used to wear round my neck. For a woman to whom the Lord gave common-sense I have made as little use of it as one could and yet pass for sane."

"I don't see why you shouldn't marry."

"Neither do I, if I wanted to; but I don't. As long as Humphrey lives I can't help feeling bound to him."

"Under the circumstances that seems to me absurd."

"So it is, but then everything else is absurd. We've got ourselves into a situation which would make an excellent farce, if it weren't always bordering upon tragedy."

"I don't see why you should continue to think of Humphrey when he has ceased to think of you."

"Has he? Has Dick ceased to think of Felicia de Prony?"

Petrina let her sewing fall and turned scarlet.

"I don't know what you mean, Emmy," she stammered.

"Forgive me," Lady de Bohun cried, seizing Petrina's hand. "That wasn't kind; but you began it. Why did you say that Humphrey had forgotten me? You might have known that I couldn't take that shot. Of course, dear, Dick doesn't give a thought to Felicia now. Besides, she doesn't deserve it."

"She never did."

"And at present less than ever. I saw her at Homburg."

Petrina leaned forward, her face all interrogation.

"Poor thing!" Lady de Bohun pursued. "She was only the ghost of her former self—like me. She was terribly thin and hollow-eyed. You had to imagine her old-time beauty, as a naturalist reconstructs an extinct animal from a few odd bones. She was with a man who called himself a Russian prince, but who, I believe, was an Armenian carpet merchant. Poor thing! She seemed to have come down in the world. I know she had sold her wonderful pearls, for those she wore were false."

"Did you speak to her?"

"Once. I could have passed her by, but I hadn't the heart. When a woman like her has lost voice, health, and beauty she is the most miserable creature alive. Fanny Ambleside and Agneta Yorkshire had cut her, and I suppose I should have done so too. But I couldn't. It seemed to me like cutting a dying woman."

"Did she ask about Dick?"

"She didn't ask exactly. She spoke about him. She seemed to keep trace of him,and knew he was married

to you. She was good-natured about it, but that doesn't mean anything. Every woman is a dog in the manger at heart."

Petrina drew the conversation upon less trying subjects, by inquiring after Tristram and Hippolyta. Presently Lady de Bohun rose to go away.

"It has been very kind of you to come, Emmy dear," Petrina said, rising too. Her eyes were moist as she looked down into Emmy's bright ones. "I was afraid of seeing you. I fancied you might think I had done wrong."

"And I do, my dear. It wasn't worth while saying so, but I do. Only, who am I to judge another woman? Hasn't my own sin found me out? Besides, in your case I feel more or less responsible."

"Oh no, Emmy. No one is responsible but myself. If I have made a mistake, no one else is to blame."

"I was older," Lady de Bohun insisted, ruefully. "I had more experience than you; and yet I accustomed you to the idea. If I hadn't divorced Humphrey I am sure you would have borne with Harry. I don't mean that I influenced you consciously. But it was in the atmosphere we lived in. It was like a mental microbe. We caught it from one another, just by breathing in such an air. We're all morally sick—Humphrey and Gentian and you and I and the whole troop of Amblesides and Yorkshires and Poynters and Tredellys and de Pronys with whom we have mixed. Even Tristram has taken the bacillus, though he was born healthy enough, poor boy. Hippolyta and Harry are the only two who have escaped, and they can't stand us. Yes, Petrina dear, I am to blame. Mother thinks so too."

"Does she speak of me?"

"Always. She writes pages about you."

"What did she say when she heard I was married? Don't be afraid to tell me."

"She was perfectly staggered. Divorce and remarriage are possibilities which her merely nineteenth-century mind have not been able to grasp. And yet she stands up for you. She thinks you were wrong; but then she feels as I do, that it is precisely when we are wrong that friends should be truest to one another. We forget that in the desire to avenge our injuries."

Petrina stood a moment with averted face. When she spoke there was a slight tremor in her voice.

"Give your mother my love, will you, Emmy?—my dear, dear love."

"And Harry sent you this," Lady de Bohun said abruptly. She took her muff from the table, and drew forth a small packet, which she placed in Petrina's hand. "I don't know what's in it," she went on rapidly, trying to show no emotion. "He sent it to me a long time ago with instructions not to give it to you till we met. He said it was of no importance, so I suppose it isn't. Good-bye now, dear. Come over to Orpington as soon as you can, and bring Dick. Don't come to the door. Good-bye."

Petrina stood pale and trembling, the packet in her hand. She was scarcely conscious of Emmy's farewell embrace or sudden departure. Her heart was beating wildly; her breath came in sobs

"My husband has sent me something," was the thought which was crying through her brain. "My husband has sent me this."

She turned the packet over. It was sealed, but unaddressed. Then she went to the door and locked it. Returning she sat down by the fire, and with nervous hands tore the outer fold of paper apart.

CHAPTER II

ON an inner envelope Petrina read these words:

"What is contained within was written, not quite with the intention that you should ever see it, not quite with the intention that you should never see it. It will serve now to show you that I know I have been wrong."

The sight of the handwriting, once so familiar, thrilled her. She opened the envelope and drew out the folded sheets. She saw at a glance that the contents had been jotted down from time to time at the urging of some half-articulate emotion. She read slowly and, at first, with imperfect comprehension.

"*January 2.*

"Two years to-day! Two years which might have been so full, and have been so empty! Why did you go? Why did I let you go? Your scorn turned me to stone; but love as great as mine should never have owned itself defeated. It must have prevailed over you at last. I have been to blame."

"*January 3.*

"Some one has said that we are forgiven for our sins, but never for our mistakes. I have found it so. For mine I have been chastised with scorpions. I loved you, and did not understand you. It was more than a mistake; it was a crime. I should have studied you and *learned* you. I should have given myself up to the effort to know you. But is it too late now? Surely there is a place of repentance for me! I would make any reparation you demanded—saving what I owe to conscience, right, and God."

"*January* 4.

"One learns much in solitude. I can understand why Moses, amid the mountains of Midian, should have grown wiser than in the court of Pharaoh. The two years since we parted have been years of solitude to me. I have mixed much with men, but among them I have been as in a desert. I have lived with an invisible companion; I have had but one friend; I have seen but one face; I have known but one personality. It has been—my Wife. My Wife! How strange it seems to me that there was a time when I called you so without trembling. Now the two little words overpower me. They have become to me what the Sacred Name was to the Jew. I can no longer speak them. Even to write them makes my heart seem to stop still. My Wife! Mine! Mine! I cling to that proud possessive. It gives you to me. It binds you to me. You are *mine*. You are far away. You have ceased to care for me. But the love you once had, the love I still have, makes you *mine*. You gave yourself to me, and 'The gods themselves cannot recall their gifts.' You cannot take yours back. You made yourself—my Wife. You may regret the deed, but it cannot be undone."

"*January* 5.

"It cannot be undone. I repeat the words I wrote last night. And since this is so, why not try once more to be to each other what, at first, we meant to be? Could you not make the effort? Could you not let me make it too? I know that you despise me; I have given you cause for that; but I love you so that I believe I could win you back. I know that you hate me. I have given you cause for even that; but I love you so that I feel the power to compel your love to return to me. Could we not begin again? You are mine. I am yours. We are bone and bone and flesh and flesh. We are one entity. As long as we are apart we are cut in two. We belong together. I away from you, you away from me—we live only as the branches live when they have been lopped from the tree. Oh, let us go back to one another! Where are you? I do not know. It is long since I have had word of you. But wherever you may be, come back. Or give me just one sign, and I will go to you."

"*January* 6.

"Yes, I will go. I will not wait for a sign. I cannot wait. I must find you—see you—hear you. In the two years I have not grown used to your absence—not any more than the thirsty man grows used to thirst. Each day has increased the torture. I have endured it only by a dogged self-command that I did not know to be in me; I have endured it only because I have been sure that if I appealed to you, you would turn away. And yet that is not all the truth. I have been upborne by pride and anger, though they are past now. I am chastened. I am brought low. I am humbled as the beast is humbled when he has not been fed. Oh, feed me! Feed me with your presence; if that is too much, with a word; if that is too much, with a look; if that is too much, with a thought, which will not be all disdain."

"*January* 7.

"I know where you are. I have learned it to-day. Why are you there? It seems strange to me. But no matter. To-morrow I go to find you. I have waited long enough. Even you cannot but admit that I have been patient—patient, but never indifferent, as some have supposed me to have grown. If I seemed to yield too soon, to give up the fight half-heartedly, it was because I would not ask of you that which you could not do spontaneously. I was too proud to plead, too sensitive to persist, too jealous, too angry, too brutal to ask for your forgiveness. But I am so no longer. I do not know whether I was right or wrong. I do not care. I start to-morrow to find you. At least the silence between us will be broken. I shall see your face, if only as I saw it last—in scorn."

"*January* 8.

"No; I cannot go. I received word this morning that you mean to break the tie that has been so loose. Can you mean it? Can you be so cruel? You have often wounded me, but can you slay my heart outright? No; I will not go. I am staggered by this new blow; stunned by this new insult. I was ready to pardon you, to come crouching to your feet and ask you to pardon me—even where I had not been wrong. Now

I will leave you to do as you desire. Go on. I could stop you if I chose, but why should I? Why should I try to hold you? You will get a nominal freedom; I shall get it too. But nothing can ever break the real bond between us. Do not deceive yourself about that. You may control human law, but you will be vanquished by the divine. And by all that is God, by all that is Nature, by all that is Love, you are my wife. I am your husband. You may tear yourself away from me, you may go where you will and become what you will, you may tell yourself never so often that I am nothing to you and that you are nothing to me, but in your heart there will always lie the knowledge, however unavowed, that we are man and wife. I leave that fact to avenge me. The day will come when you will confess that man cannot put asunder those whom God has joined together. Then your chastisement will begin."

"*January* 10.

"Why did I write thus? I cannot tell. I let it stand, even though I take it back. After all, you are right, perhaps. It is wrong to chain the eagle to the earth; it is wrong, doubtless, that you should be chained to me. I am of the earth—dull, laborious, commonplace; you are a glorious creature meant to soar in strength and beauty. Go; rise; live your life. I stay here, gazing after you. What should I do if I brought you back—even if you came back of your own free will? I could not make you happy. You would be like a bird of the cliffs, caught and kept in a cage. We were not made for each other. We could never meet more closely than land meets sea—just enough to touch, but to stay apart. I am the pine-tree that has loved a palm. There is no future for me but to stand rooted in my barren north-land. Be it so. I accept my portion. But oh, I have loved you! you will never know. I could never say, how well. I have sometimes thought that you did not understand this; that I never tried sufficiently to make you understand. They say our New England hearts are encased with ice; but if so, it is ice behind which there is fire. In my heart that fire will always burn. If the time should ever come when you are cold and comfortless, come

back and warm yourself at its flame; it will be bright for your return."

"*April* 11.

"Our wedding-day—three years ago. I hear you have gone to Italy—free. And you have left me here—free. Great God, what freedom! If I were a woman, I'd rather be a harem slave than to be free like you; free at such a price; free, and yet, after all, not free; for you are bound to me. Only when the living heart can be torn out of the living body can your existence be wrenched out of mine. You have sailed away thinking you are rid of me. I say nothing; I do nothing. I live my plodding, monotonous life, which you think you could never share. You *must* share it—and more intimately now than ever. The farther you go from me, the more persistently will your thoughts return. Your heart will cry *My Husband,* even when your lips refuse to frame the word. Oh, love, you can never be rid of me!—not any more than the assassin can be rid of the man whom he has slain."

"*August* 19.

"I have just heard that you are married; and to him—mine own familiar friend! There are blows too hard ever to expect, ever to repay, ever to forgive. How strange that, writing four months ago, I should have used of you the word *Assassin!* It was a figure then; it is a fact now. Good-bye, good-bye. The fire is always burning in this poor heart, which every one thinks frozen; but you will never come to warm yourself at it any more. That hope, dim as it was, is ended. Once more, good-bye."

"*August* 20.

"And yet, by God, you are my wife; you are not his; you never can be his. I recognize no law that gives him what is mine. Remember that. Cut it word by word on the tablets of your heart: you are not his wife. Oh, unhappy woman, how far pride and folly and self-will have carried you! Up to the present my arms have been open to you, waiting for your return; now they are closed. But no! I must not say it. The love I had for you, the pity I still have, make me gen-

tle with you, even against my will. Time will beat you down. There will come a day when you must drink of the cup which you have mingled. You will reach an hour when the reed you are leaning on will break. And then—even then—if you were to look towards home, you would find its doors open. I am your husband; you are my wife; and in spite of all, if a moment of need ever comes to you, I shall be at your side. This shall be my last word to you. Again, and I suppose forever, good-bye, good-bye!"

It was not until she had read these broken utterances more than once that Petrina began to understand them. As their sense stole upon her, the tears came to her eyes. When, for the third time, she had scanned them to the very end, she bowed her head upon the table and sobbed.

"Oh, Harry, my husband," she moaned, "you loved me, after all. Why did I leave you? Why am I here, in this strange place, with this strange man? This is not my husband; this is not my home. Where are you? Don't you know I love you?—that I have loved you all along?"

But she started up with a cry.

"What am I saying? What am I making of myself? Whose wife am I? Oh, my God, into what mad situation have I brought myself!"

She seized again the paper which had fallen from her hands, and read at random here and there:

"I have lived with an invisible companion; I have had but one friend; I have seen but one face; I have known but one personality. It has been—my Wife."

"The two little words overpower me. They have become to me what the Sacred Name was to the Jew. Even to write them makes my heart seem to stop still. My Wife!"

"The love you once had, the love I still have, makes you mine."

"You are mine. I am yours. We are bone and bone and flesh and flesh. We are one entity."

"Nothing can ever break the real bond between us. Do not deceive yourself about that. You may control human law, but you will be vanquished by the divine. And by all that is God, by all that is Nature, by all that is Love, you are my wife."

"Only when the living heart can be torn out of the living body can your existence be wrenched out of mine."

"Oh, unhappy woman—!"

But she could read no more. She flung the paper from her and fell upon her knees.

"Harry, dear Harry, spare me!" she muttered, brokenly. "I have wronged you. I was bitter to you. But oh, take me back! Let me come home. I am afraid. Everything here is so mysterious and awful. I don't know what Dick means. I don't know why he is so silent and strange. I don't even know why he married me. Come for me! Help me to escape! It is like living in a nightmare. I am your wife. We gave each other our young love; we were to each other what we could be to no one else, what no one else can ever be to us. All the consecration that makes two beings one came down on us and made us man and wife. We are the living heart in the living body; to be torn asunder is like death. I know it, Harry. I have always known it. But I was ignorant, wilful, and wicked. They perplexed me with their laws and lies. They made me think the unnatural natural and the false true. But I have learned better. I am your wife. I am not Dick's. I am only Dick's—"

She sprang to her feet again. The blood surged into her face and receded suddenly, leaving her pale. The room seemed to swim around her, and she leaned on the high back of a chair to keep herself steady.

"Dick's what?" she asked herself.

"His mistress," came the reply, as if delivered by a voice outside her. "His mistress," the voice repeated. "His mistress! His mistress!"

She threw her head back proudly. She stood quite still. Her mind seemed to take an attitude of defiance.

"If you are Harry Vassall's wife, you are Dick Lechmere's mistress," went hammering through her brain.

"I am not Dick Lechmere's mistress."

"Then you are not Harry Vassall's wife."

"My God, I am trapped!" she cried, quite aloud, her voice sounding strange in the silence of the room. She made a sudden movement, like a captive animal trying to wrench itself free. "I am trapped," she repeated, in a dry, hard voice, full of a tearless recognition of her situation. "If I am the one man's wife I am the other man's mistress. I can't evade that fact. It is too clear. If I am still Harry's wife, I am a fallen woman."

A quick exclamation, like a mirthless laugh, burst from her lips. She began to pace feverishly up and down the room. As she passed a mirror her figure, with its long tread, seemed to herself like that of some feline creature in a cage. Her very eyes had the expression of a mured-up thing searching with a restless, pathetic patience for some unhoped-for means of escape.

"If I am still Harry's wife I am a fallen woman. If I am still Harry's wife I am a fallen woman."

She repeated the words mechanically. Their meaning was too great to be taken in all at once.

"If I am still Harry's wife I am a fallen woman. And I *am* Harry's wife. He is quite right. I am his wife. I gave myself to him in a way which admits of no taking back. Nature itself tells one so. Divorce? What is a divorce? The tearing of bone from bone and flesh

from flesh. If it were a possible thing it would be a crime against Nature. But it isn't a possible thing. Oh, I wonder if other women feel as I do? I know so many who have passed from husband to husband. I wonder if they ever have moments like this? I wonder if they don't have days when Nature asserts herself above sophistry, and they own themselves what they are?"

She paced up and down and round and round, turning on her steps like a tigress. Suddenly she stopped by the table and again snatched up the loose sheets she had thrown down.

"'You may tear yourself away from me,'" she read, "'you may go where you will and become what you will, you may tell yourself never so often that I am nothing to you, and that you are nothing to me; but in your heart there will always be the knowledge, however unavowed, that we are man and wife.' Yes; that's true," she commented. "That knowledge is in my heart. We are man and wife."

She turned the pages hastily and with trembling hands.

"'The farther you go from me,'" she read again, "'the more persistently will your thoughts return. Your heart will cry, *My Husband,* even when your lips refuse to frame the word.' But they don't refuse any longer, Harry," she whispered, hoarsely. "I admit it all. But why have you come back to me so? I thought I had forgotten you; you seemed so far away; it was as if I had outlived you; and now, O heart of my heart! you are back with me, claiming me, mastering me, when I am only a fallen woman who dares not return. If I am your wife I am his mistress—mistress!—mistress!—mistress! Who ever could have predicted that such a name should one day be applied to me? I was

so proud, so disdainful, so independent! And now the meanest may scorn me as they pass me by."

She crushed the page in her hand, throwing it again on the table, and staggered to the mantel-piece. She leaned on it to support herself, feeling dizzy and faint.

"I suppose," she mused, bitterly, "that it is in such moments as this that people create for themselves a god. They want some one to do the impossible, and so they pray. If I believed in a god I should pray, too. But there is nothing in all the universe almighty enough to take me out of the net in which I have been caught. O God!—God whom Harry Vassall serves and Dick Lechmere believes in!—if you were here in this room with me, as they would tell me that you are, I should cry to you, out of all the depths of a woman's woe, to come and help me. But you are not! There is no such God! If I prayed I should only beat the air and call upon what is even more helpless than myself."

But a sudden change came over her. An expression of terror passed for an instant across her face. She began once more to pace the room.

"What am I saying? I have gone mad. I have let myself be frightened. I mustn't be foolish. I must try not to give way."

She paused before the mirror and looked at herself.

"A fallen woman," were the words that crossed her mind; but at their repetition she revolted.

"Never, never!" she said aloud, with a quick return of energy. "Never, never! I shall never admit that. I shall break my own heart first. I shall crush out everything I ever believed in or held as true."

With this new resolution a little color came stealing back to her cheek; the light of pride gleamed again in her eyes. She looked at herself with more approval. A hard smile began to glimmer about her lips.

"You've been frightened by a ghost," she said, addressing her reflection in the glass. "But it's only a ghost. Hereafter you must be more courageous. The day isn't lost. There is still something left to fight for. You must be strong and daring, and never assent to a suspicion upon your own honor. Harry Vassall must be nothing to you. If his image is still in your heart, stamp it out. Despise what he has written. Laugh at what he thinks. Show neither weakness nor mercy, for otherwise you are lost. You are lost, do you hear? You must be Dick Lechmere's wife. It is that title which alone gives you self-esteem, and enables you to hold up your head among men. You must cling to it yourself; you must let no one question your right to wear it. For you Harry Vassall is like a dead man. You are Petrina Lechmere, Dick Lechmere's wife."

She turned from the mirror slowly. She was calmer. Her color died away again, but her excitement died, too.

"Yes, I must be Dick's wife," she assented. "I must be that. I must be that. I must blot Harry out forever. I have no choice about it. Everything depends upon my doing so. The lot is cast, and I must abide by it. Whatever I feel, I must believe that that tie is broken. The man I love is nothing to me any more. I am Dick's wife. I am Dick's wife."

She moved slowly towards the table and gathered up the scattered sheets covered with Vassall's writing. She folded them with care. Then, stooping, she laid them on the fire and watched them burn.

Into the little packet the fire ate its way but slowly. The sheets, bordered by a faint edge of flame, grew crisp and curled apart. Here and there the lines of writing became legible. Petrina bent down and read:

"Love as great as mine—"

"The love I still have—"

"Oh, let us go back to one another—"

"I am your husband; you are my wife."

"Forever good-bye—good-bye!"

But the fire burned up more briskly, and a quick-leaping flame blotted out all the rest. A few minutes later there was nothing left of the record of Vassall's love but a little heap of ashes.

Petrina turned from the fire, and, walking to the window, laid her forehead against the pane.

"It's all over," she murmured. "I don't care. I must not love him. I don't love him. I love Dick. He is my husband. I don't care."

She choked back the sob which rose as if in protest against her words, and tried to regain her self-possession. She noticed that it was growing dark. Dick would be coming in. He must not suspect that anything had happened to unnerve her.

Going to the door, she unlocked it and passed out into the hall.

"Has Mr. Lechmere returned?" she asked a servant.

"Yes'm," replied the woman. "He has just gone up-stairs."

Petrina went up too, dragging herself wearily.

Her own room, as she entered it, was dark, but the light shone through the half-open door which led into Lechmere's dressing-room. Instinctively she paused and looked within. Under the hanging lamp Lechmere was standing partially turned towards her. In his left hand, which fell at his side, he grasped a newspaper. He had apparently been reading it. Petrina noticed unconsciously that it was the Paris *Figaro*. In his right hand he held a miniature, into which he was gazing earnestly. Petrina knew it to be the like-

ness of Felicia de Prony, that always stood beside his bed. When he had looked long he raised the miniature to his lips.

"And I have burned Harry's last words to me," Petrina thought, as she sank into a chair and sighed.

CHAPTER III

THE sigh called Lechmere's attention. He put the portrait of Felicia in its place on the table and entered her room.

"Are you there, Petrina?" he asked.

"Yes, Dick."

He came and stood before her. In the darkness she could not see his face, but she had a premonition of trouble.

"Is anything the matter?" she inquired, when he did not speak.

"I am going away," he stammered. "I've had important news. I must take the night express to Paris."

Her heart sank. She felt instinctively that the journey had some connection with Felicia de Prony.

"Shall you be gone long?"

"I can't tell yet. It may be a week. It may be more. I will write to you."

Other questions were on her lips, but she dared not put them. She was trembling with fear. After all, she might lose him. She had given herself to him, but he might be tired already of the gift. He would not be dastardly; she was sure of that. But if the call of the one love of his life were to come to him he would be deaf to any claims that she could put forth and heedless of any pain she might have to suffer. She knew that she would count for nothing if Felicia de Prony were to speak.

"I sha'n't remain longer than I can help," he added, as she remained silent.

"Very well," she replied.

"You might have Emmy de Bohun come to stay with you. Or you might stay with her."

"Possibly. We will see."

"I'm sorry, Petrina. I hope you don't mind."

"Certainly not," she answered, rising. "If you have business you must attend to it. Can I do anything to help you pack?"

"No, thanks. Brooks is seeing to that."

"Then you will not be here to dinner?"

"I shall scarcely have time. I must take the six-twenty-five to Charing Cross."

No more was said. Petrina maintained her calm demeanor until he had gone. But when, after dinner, she was alone in the sitting-room, where she had spent the afternoon, she began to seek the reasons for this hasty journey. All at once she remembered the *Figaro* she had seen in his hand. She had paid no attention to it then, but now it became important.

"There was something in it," she said. "I wonder if he has left it behind."

She hurried up-stairs, and, lighting a candle, went into his room. Yes, there was the journal folded neatly and laid in a corner. She looked at the date and found it yesterday's. It was the copy which had arrived at Oldbarns that afternoon. She put down her candle, and took the paper in her hands. She passed over the political article by "Whist," and the diloague by Alfred Capus. She looked rapidly through the "Échos," but there was nothing there, and over "Hors Paris," but there was nothing there. In "Le Monde et la Ville" there was likewise nothing; but in the "Courrier des Théâtres" the name she was seeking caught her eye.

"*Nous apprenons avec regret,*" Petrina read, "*que Madame Félicia de Prony n'a pas pu continuer son engagement à la Potinière. L'admirable artiste, autrefois si applaudie à l'Opéra-Comique, est tombée sérieusement malade. Elle a déjà quitté Paris et est partie pour l'Italie et l'Égypte.*"

Petrina let the journal fall.

"Yes," she said to herself; "yes, I thought so. She is ill, and he has gone to her. I might have known he would. I might have predicted it that day in Windsor Forest. Oh, what a fool I've been! No woman ever thought so highly of herself, and yet has lived to be brought so low. I am deserted for the second time. I wonder if he will ever come back?"

She sank into an arm-chair and stared with dull, half-unconscious gaze at the flickering of the candle.

"What was it Harry wrote?" she asked herself at last. "'There will come a day when you must drink of the cup which you have mingled.' Well, that day has come sooner than he thought. I wish I hadn't burned the writing. But, no; it was better to do it. The words, as he says, are 'cut on the tablets of my heart'; I shall not forget them."

She picked up the *Figaro* from the floor and read the paragraph again.

"Italy and Egypt," she commented. "The range is wide; he may not be able to find her. 'La Potinière'! What is that? Ah, yes, I remember. A sort of Folies-Bergère of the exterior boulevards. She must, indeed, have fallen low to accept an engagement there. And it is for a woman like that that he has left me! I wonder why he married me at all? But need I ask? It was for the same reason that I married him. We thought to console each other; and we have waked to find ourselves inconsolable. Besides, in marrying me he was

disloyal to Harry. He didn't think of it at first, but I can see his remorse for it now. He is so dishonorable, and yet so sensitive to dishonor! Poor Dick! He reminds me of Vathek when the flame begins to burn in his heart. And I am like Nouronihar. I feel as if the fire had broken out in mine. Dick and I can never look each other in the face again without being conscious of the torment which overtakes those who try to gain their ends through treachery."

She rose and went down-stairs. The evening dragged itself away somehow. She tried to read; she tried to sew; she tried to keep herself from thinking; but in spite of herself her memory went back to the night when she had waited for Harry Vassall in the silent house in Boston.

With the morning her dread took complete possession of her. Lechmere might never return. If he found Felicia de Prony willing to keep him, it was certain that he would stay. And Petrina clung to him as she had never clung to Vassall. There was nothing but his name between her and social downfall. If he were to leave her it would mean that she had lost all claim not only to the world's consideration, but to her own self-respect. She would become like some of the vile women she had known—like Mrs. Tredelly, for instance, who lived now under one man's roof and now under another's—women whom she had treated with contemptuous toleration, but from whose touch she had drawn her skirts away. As the days went by she grew more and more to feel—even morbidly to feel—that only the continuance of Lechmere's favor would preserve her from a fate like that.

It was, therefore, some slight satisfaction to be able to guess from his letters that he had not found Felicia. He wrote often, but rarely twice from the same place.

From Paris he had pushed on at once to Italy, and the letters Petrina received were from Turin, Venice, Milan, Padua, Bologna, Florence, Rome, and Naples. By-and-by they came from Alexandria and Cairo; then from Athens, Constantinople, Buda-Pesth, and Vienna. He was evidently travelling fast, as though following some will-o'-the wisp of hope. When he came back he looked ten years older. He said nothing, and Petrina asked no questions, but she knew that his search had been in vain.

"Where did Dick go?" Emilia de Bohun asked one day, just after Lechmere returned.

Petrina had driven over to Orpington Park, determined not to give any hint of her anxiety. But Emmy was keen to see, and she herself yearning for comfort. Little by little she told the great fear under which she lived.

"But, good gracious me!" cried Lady de Bohun, "Felicia is neither in Italy nor in Egypt. She's in America. When she made such a fiasco at La Potinière she accepted an offer from New Orleans or San Francisco, I forget which. Gerald Bertie keeps track of her and told me so. If Dick had only asked him, he would have been saved a lot of time and trouble."

"Don't tell him, Emmy," Petrina pleaded.

Emmy did not tell him, but perhaps Gerald Bertie did; for before Christmas Lechmere announced to Petrina his intention of going back to Boston.

"I have ordered the house at Brookline to be made ready for us," he said. "I think you will like it, though it hasn't been lived in for years."

"Do you mean me to go, too?" asked Petrina, whose heart seemed paralyzed at the first words of his announcement.

"I think it would be better. I may be a long time over there."

"I couldn't," she said, in a voice so dead that it did not reach his ear.

Then she began to reflect. After all, why should she not go? She had meant never to return to America again, or, if so, not till many years had gone by. But why? she asked. If Lechmere went, what could she gain by staying behind? If he meant to desert her, he would not have asked her to go. He could easily abandon one who was far away; with one who was near at hand and under his roof it would be harder. It was true that she would run the risk of seeing Vassall. That, she said, must be as it fell out. She told herself that she would do her utmost to avoid him; and yet, at the thought that any chance errand might bring them face to face, the blood mounted warmly to the cheek that had grown pale.

So when Lechmere spoke of it again she consented. With the decision she even grew more cheerful. As she looked out at the brown fields and the leafless hedgerows, it was with a new leaping of the heart in the thought of going home. It was not home in the sense of the hearth and the household, but it was home in the sense of the motherland for which one longs in the moment of fatigue and loneliness. There would be no loving heart to greet her, nor eager hands stretched out to hers; but there would be the low, friendly Massachusetts shores and the familiar Boston streets, and, by-and-by, the consolation of immensity and peace amid the dear New Hampshire hills. Yes, she would go. It might be from ill to worse, but it would at least be towards home.



A Vitagraph Production. *Let Not Man Put Asunder.*

DICK LECHMERE (LOU TELLEGEN) AND PETRINA FANEUIL (PAULINE FREDERICK) MARRY.

CHAPTER IV

IT *was* home. Petrina felt it so from the first hour at the Meerstead—the old Lechmere place on the uplands behind Brookline.

The house had long been uninhabited, and the furnishings were faded and old-fashioned; but the rooms were stately and cheerful with winter sunshine. The land had been the Lechmeres' meerstead from very early times in Boston. It had been at first a farm; the Lechmeres themselves were farmers. They were a dreamy, fanatical race, but at the same time thrifty; and as Boston grew in importance they increased in wealth. From being yeomen they became gentlemen. To their farm they added merchandise, and each generation made some advance upon the last. After the Revolution the Lechmeres of his day replaced the farmhouse by a colonial mansion, which, in turn, about sixty years later, gave place to a still larger dwelling, in the then-prevailing taste for the pseudo-classical. People said that old Richard Lechmere had copied the White House on a smaller scale; but, whether this was so or not, the long building, with its pillared portico and generous steps, produced a dignified effect as seen on the summit of its low, well-timbered hill. The Lechmeres had held tenaciously to the Meerstead when their neighbors had long ago sold their lands and moved into fine town-houses in Boston. What was at first a farm, and was still modestly called "the grounds," was really something of a park, with nothing of the

agricultural except the meadows and large gardens.

From the moment of arrival Petrina felt that she could love the spot. It was so far from Boston—a long hour's drive—that it offered her seclusion; and she meant to live there as a solitary nun in a rather spacious cloister.

She felt the more able to do so from the fact that Dick seemed happier. Since they had sailed from England the darkest shade of melancholy had lifted from his face, and there were times when he was cheerful in a simple, natural way, which made Petrina hope. To be at the Meerstead again had a good effect upon him. Though he had so long turned his back on the old place, and affected not to care for it, yet now that he was there, amid the memories of his boyhood, his heart grew lighter. At the end of a week he had become, so Petrina thought, more healthily minded. He ceased to brood in silence, and when he talked it was no longer in the pessimistic strain which at first had touched, but now alarmed, her. He interested himself in the commonplace details of settling into a house which was in need of renovation, and took pleasure in his plans for improving the neglected grounds. It was late in February, and the days brought with them a little hint of spring. Petrina could not be quite insensible to their gladness, and found herself wondering whether, after all, the flowers might not bloom for her again. She would keep her cloister strictly, so she told herself; but even in a nunnery there are interests which make the days pass by not altogether sadly.

If only Dick would cleave to her! There were times when she thought he would; there were others when it seemed to her as if her installation in this great house

was only a handsome preliminary to his leaving her. "He wants to provide for me," she would say to herself; but when she saw him so unfailingly kind, she would try to thrust such fears away. They never spoke now of Felicia. It was impossible for Petrina to learn whether or not Lechmere knew of his former wife's presence in America. Petrina could only watch him closely, and try to interpret signs according to their most probable significance.

During the first week at the Meerstead it was a comfort to her that he never left her. He did not even receive letters without telling her the contents. When, therefore, one morning he informed her that he was going to drive into Boston and would not return till evening, she was suddenly afraid.

"Couldn't one of the men go for you?" she asked, with an anxiety impossible to conceal.

"Hardly," he answered. "There are so many things to order."

"I could make a list of them and give it to Jones. I'm sure he could be trusted."

"And I'm sure I can," Lechmere insisted, with a smile. It was his new smile—the smile of cheerful sanity which she had remarked of late—and so she felt slightly reassured.

She let him go without further protest, but her interest in that day's work was at end. They were still "settling" the house. They had unpacked and distributed such objects as they had brought from abroad, and were now occupied in arranging the family porcelain and plate after its long storage. It was a task in which she delighted, and, at the moment when he spoke to her, she stood holding in her hands a large golden bowl, of beautiful design, which for many years had been one of the Lechmere treasures. She was de-

bating as to where to put it so as to make it show to the best advantage. But with Lechmere's departure she lost heart. She placed it indifferently on a table in the drawing-room, and then, walking to a window, watched him drive down the long avenue towards the town.

She continued to stand there even when the cart and its occupant had disappeared among the leafless trees. She was vaguely unhappy. The house seemed all at once to grow larger and emptier. When she turned from the window her surroundings had suddenly become strange, as though she did not belong among them. She had a return of the fear that Lechmere had brought her there merely to establish her in dignity and comfort, and that the thing being done, he had gone, to come back no more.

She tried to laugh at her dread and to reason it down. She took up the golden bowl again and placed it now here, now there, standing back to get the effect. But her mind was not on the task. Wherever she put the bowl it looked awkward and as though made of brass. At last she left it impatiently on a table in a corner, and resolved to give her attention to the rehanging of the pictures. She had already decided to put the Copleys together, and began inspecting them with critical attention. But, as she moved from one to another, they seemed to spring into a kind of life, and to gaze at her as though asking by what right she was there. Old Martha Lechmere, in brown satin and white lace which looked as though you could pick them up, had for Petrina an expression so living that she recoiled before it. Judge Richard Lechmere, in eighteenth-century small-clothes and a bonnet like the poet Cowper's, glanced at her with a soft, oblique regard, as though Dick's own eyes were questioning her. She

passed hurriedly on to Penelope Lechmere, a prettily prim young lady in muslin and blue ribboned cap; but the girl, too, had the Lechmere eyes, melancholy, mystical, gentle, and disconcerting in their very steadiness. Even though it was a sunny morning, Petrina had a strange sense of being surrounded by ghostly presences, who demanded reproachfully why she should come to disturb the possessions that had once been theirs.

No, she would leave the pictures for another day, she said. Why should she interfere with them when perhaps Dick would never return? The idea was becoming an obsession, and she tried to shake it off. She turned her back upon the Copleys with their haunting eyes, and went slowly down the room, endeavoring to fix her attention on something else. At a window looking to the eastward she paused and gazed absently outward. Far away, over miles of undulating winter landscape, two slim spires stood out against the sky. They were the spires of Old Cambridge; Lechmere had told her so one day, and since then she never saw them without thinking of Harry Vassall. There were many questions concerning him to which she would have been glad to know the answer. Had he heard that she had returned? Would he shrink from meeting her? Did she shrink from meeting him? If they were to meet, how should they greet each other? Would he be merciful? Should she be able to keep her self-control?

She was still pondering these things when a sound of carriage-wheels arrested her attention. The thought that some old, unwelcome friend was coming to break in on her seclusion angered her. The solitude which was terrible abroad was sweet now that she was in Massachusetts. She remained at the window listening, while the door was opened and some one entered.

"Mrs. Vassall," the servant announced.

Petrina turned and, seeing the small figure in black hesitating on the threshold, her annoyance melted into pleasure. It could not but be a pleasure mingled with embarrassment, and after the first greetings were over both women were confused. Petrina led her guest to a sofa, where they sat down side by side, but turning towards each other, as on the day when they first met. As Mrs. Vassall raised her black veil it was evident that she had grown to look much older, though the excitement of the moment had brought to her white, wax-like cheeks a faint touch of red.

"I hope Mr. Lechmere isn't here?" Mrs. Vassall began, tremulously.

"He has gone in to Boston," Petrina replied, taking the elder woman's hand. "He will not be back till evening."

"You mustn't think it strange that I have asked that question," Mrs. Vassall went on, nervously. "I have come on a very special errand."

"And to give me a very special pleasure," said Petrina, trying to carry off her confusion by seeming at her ease.

"I should have come before, dear Petrina, if I had known that you would have liked it. I hesitated only because—"

"I hope you will never hesitate again. It is easier for you to come to me than for me to go to you."

At this allusion the color in Mrs. Vassall's face became hectic, and she grew more nervous than before.

"What has brought me is this," she began, brusquely. "A few days ago a foreign woman came to see me who said she was Mr. Lechmere's— But what's the matter, dear? You're not well. Let me ring for some one."

"No, no," Petrina managed to say, gently forcing Mrs. Vassall back into her seat. "Please go on. I felt rather faint for a minute, but it's over. Please go on. Some one came to see you, I think you said?"

"Yes, a foreign woman. She said she was the person Mr. Lechmere married some years ago."

There was a slight pause, during which they sat gazing into each other's eyes. Petrina felt as if the first distant sound of the trumpet of judgment were stealing on the world. But she nerved herself to hear what must be heard, and when she spoke it was calmly.

"Yes?" she said, still holding the other's hand. "And what then, dear Mrs. Vassall?"

"I didn't believe her."

"Oh!"

"I couldn't. She was such a very common person—not at all a lady."

"What did you do?"

"I gave her some money, and took her address."

"You gave her—?" Petrina began in amazement.

"Some money. Oh, not much, dear—just enough to carry her over a few days."

"And she took it?"

"You see, she was so poor," Mrs. Vassall explained, as if to justify her action, "and so ill. I've no doubt that the story she told me wasn't true, but I couldn't send her away without doing something. Even though I didn't believe her I cried when she told me her tale. It was so pitiful."

"What tale? You see I know nothing about it. Do tell me what she said."

"I knew you'd be interested, dear, and perhaps we can help her together. I know a very nice Home where I think they'd take her. There's a Miss Magill at the

head of it—such a wise person—who has had great experience with women of that class."

"Women of what class? Do tell me quickly. I'm keenly anxious to hear about her. What did she say? Why did she go to see you?"

"I couldn't quite make out; she rambled so. She spoke of you and Mr. Lechmere and Harry and Emmy, and mixed you all up together in such a way that I couldn't tell what she meant. She said over and over again that she was Mr. Lechmere's wife, and so seemed to think she had some claim on me."

"Mr. Lechmere was married at one time to Madame Felicia de Prony, who used to be a singer of some renown."

"I knew that. This woman said it was her name."

"Did you tell—your son?"

"Yes, but he said he didn't understand how it could possibly be she."

"Nor do I. He didn't see her, then?"

"No; he went yesterday to the address she gave—a very ordinary kind of lodging-house—but she had gone."

"Then how do you propose to help her?"

"She will probably come back to me again when she has spent the money I gave her. I thought her a very unpractical person. She wanted to use some of it to have her photograph taken. She said it would help her to get a position in a theatre."

"I don't see how it could be Madame de Prony. When I last heard of her she was in such a different situation."

"Was it with an Armenian carpet-merchant?"

The suddenness of this question coming from Mrs. Vassall almost made Petrina smile.

"I think it was," she admitted. "Emmy saw her with him at Homburg."

"Oh, the poor thing told me all about him—such a sad story. She had gone into his family as companion, she said, though I didn't understand to whom. He called himself a Russian prince, but she learned that he was nothing of the kind. When she would have exposed him he treated her shamefully. He even beat her and robbed her of her jewels. In Paris he left her without a word or a penny. She was reduced to such straits that she was obliged to sing in some very low place, where the men smoked and drank during the performance. This made her ill and she had to give up the position. Then some gentleman—a manager she called him—brought her to America a few months ago. She was to sing and dance in comic plays; but she couldn't; she was too ill. You can see that by looking at her. In San Francisco she had to give up the attempt, and then with nearly all her money gone she struggled back to the East again. I don't know how she knew about me; she talked incoherently about other actors and actresses who had given her the information."

"Did she know that Mr. Lechmere and I had returned to this country?"

Petrina put the question boldly, but she felt that all her future life depended on the answer.

"She seemed to have heard something of the sort, but I didn't tell her anything decisive. I was afraid she might come here and annoy you. You see, I didn't believe that she could be the person she called herself, and so I was careful about what I said. She asked me where Mr. Lechmere lived when he was in Boston, and how she could find him. Of course I didn't tell her."

"What did she look like?" Petrina inquired, abruptly.

"Like a dying woman."

Petrina started. The answer recalled Lady de Bohun's words of several months before.

"I don't mean that, Mrs. Vassall," she corrected. "I mean her features and air. Was she beautiful?"

"You could see that she had been so, though she was too thin and white and worn to have much beauty left. She had lovely fair hair, and large, soft, blue eyes. There was a refinement about her in spite of the fact that she was not a lady. I can't describe her; she was too unlike any kind of woman with whom I have ever had to do. She seemed to know more about the luxuries of life than its necessaries. There was something of the fallen princess about her—I mean," Mrs. Vassall added, softly, "the princess who has fallen very, very low. I couldn't believe her, and yet—and yet—"

"And yet," Petrina finished, "she didn't seem like an impostor."

"That is it. I couldn't believe that a woman who had held her position and been Mr. Lechmere's wife could have come to such awful want."

"Isn't it only the old story of La Cigale?"

"Then you think it may be she?"

"Of course I couldn't say that," Petrina replied, warily.

"But whoever she is, don't you think we ought to help her if we can?"

"If we can."

"And perhaps Mr. Lechmere might do something if he knew."

"I'd rather he didn't know."

"It is naturally a delicate matter."

Petrina sat awhile in thought. No one would have guessed from her calm exterior how desperate she felt. To get rid of Felicia at any cost was the only expedient she could think of.

"If you could find this woman, dear Mrs. Vassall," she began, slowly, "I should be willing to do anything in my power to aid her. I should spare neither care nor money to keep her from want. I should be willing to give her a large income for the rest of her life. I should do anything, anything, to get her to go away and to keep her from—from troubling Mr. Lechmere."

"I understand that, dear," said the little woman, sadly. "If I can help you, I will."

"Mr. Lechmere has suffered much on her account. I don't want him to suffer more."

"Then you do think it is she?"

"Perhaps. In any case, if you or Harry—I mean Mr. Vassall—can find her, spend any sum, however large, to feed and clothe and provide for her; only send her away."

There was no mistaking the look of beseeching in Petrina's eyes, though she tried to speak steadily and to keep the ring of appeal from her voice. She would not have any one suspect that she did not feel herself mistress of the situation.

"Poor dear!" murmured Mrs. Vassall, the tears starting to her eyes. "I understand how you feel. You must love him so!"

"It isn't that," Petrina stammered, coloring.

"If only you and he had known each other before he met this dreadful woman, and before you and Harry—"

"It isn't that," Petrina repeated, painfully. "Oh, Mrs. Vassall," she burst out suddenly, "life is so hard! I didn't know it was possible to make such mistakes. I've been very foolish. I've tangled myself up in an awful web of circumstance, and now I can neither stay in it nor get out. I've been like a person running through a quagmire; with every struggle to free myself I've sunk deeper in. What am I to do?"

She checked herself again. She would not ask for pity.

"But we won't talk of my affairs," she said, with a forced smile. "Tell me about yourself. How have you been all winter? Have you heard from Emmy within the last few days? I saw her just before we sailed."

Then she brought out her scraps of news, and tried to talk as if she were not in an agony of terror.

"Dick has gone to her," was the thought ringing in her mind. "He is with her now. Oh, my God, what am I to do? I am a nameless, repudiated woman."

Yet she talked on, not cheerfully, but with well-feigned serenity, until Mrs. Vassall rose to go. Then, for an instant, Petrina's reserve broke down again.

"How good you are to me!" she cried, when they stood at the door and had already said good-bye. "I wish you weren't going. I don't want to be left alone. I feel sure that something dreadful is going to happen, and I'm afraid."

"If ever you want me I will come instantly. You will only have to speak the word."

"I oughtn't to trouble you, but there's no one who seems so near to me as you. I'm so foolishly weak that I want some one's hand to cling to, and I don't know any but yours. You'll forgive me for all the unhappiness I've brought upon you, won't you? I need the forgiveness of others also, but I dare not ask for any one's but yours. You're so good!"

"Not good, dear, but only made sympathetic through suffering."

"And so strong."

"No, nor strong, but only upheld by the everlasting arms. They are about you, too, dear, if you could only feel them."

"But I can't."

"For all that they will not be withdrawn."

They kissed each other again, and Mrs. Vassall went away. She drove straight to her son's office to send him in immediate search of "the foreign woman." Then she returned home to pass the afternoon in prayer.

CHAPTER V

LEFT alone, Petrina waited, almost paralyzed by fear. "Will he come back, or will he not?" She could think of nothing else; she could ask no other question. She sat in the big, lonely drawing-room, with the soft eyes of the Copley portraits looking down at her, but she no longer shivered at their regard. She was indifferent to everything but that which Fate might have in immediate store. In the middle of the afternoon dull clouds came up; the wind blew hard, and it began to snow. "If he is coming, he will come now," Petrina thought, looking out over the landscape, on which the new-fallen flakes were making little drifts of whiteness.

Just before it grew dark there was a loud ring at the door. Petrina listened. A minute later a telegram was brought to her. "I know its contents in advance," she thought as she took it from the salver. "It is his farewell." But she was wrong. It was only a prosaic message to say that he had been detained longer than he had expected, and would not return till late in the evening. She was to dine without him.

The intelligence that he would return at all produced a reaction so great that she could scarcely hold herself back from bursting into tears of joy. But she was being schooled to self-command, and gave no other sign of relief than a renewal of the task, interrupted in the morning, of arranging the drawing-room. She set herself to work again with buoyancy in her gait and cheerfulness in her expression. She felt like a reprieved

prisoner. All danger was not passed, but the actual moment at least seemed secure. She took up the golden bowl again, and found a place for it. She reviewed the Copleys once more and settled just where they were to be rehung. It was her nature to rebound from anxiety the moment the strain became a little lighter. Evening found her determined to make another effort. If he came to her from seeing the poor, sick creature Mrs. Vassall had described, he should find himself dazzled by the health and beauty waiting for him at home. Petrina had never tried to hold him by coquetry or art, but she could command them, and would do it now. So she dressed herself all in the soft, trailing, spangled black in which she knew she looked her best. She put diamond stars on her breast, and clasped a diamond collar about her neck. As she looked in the mirror her eye flashed with admiration of her own completeness. "And," she thought, with an astonishment that brought the warm color to her cheek, "it is for a dying courtesan that he would reject such a woman as I."

She dined late and alone. As she rose from the table and swept into the hall, there was something regal about her. But she stopped suddenly and shivered. The outer door was open, and a cutting wind was driving in. Two servants were whispering at the door, evidently refusing to admit some one who was outside.

"What is it?" she asked, sharply, going down the hall. "What is the matter?"

"There is a person here—"

The footman was not allowed to continue. Petrina herself was at the door. She and Felicia de Prony stood again face to face.

It was snowing hard, and the night was cold. The

singer, lightly clad, stood between the great white pillars of the portico. It was La Cigale to the life.

The shock of meeting was so great that for a moment neither woman spoke. Petrina stood as in a dream. She remarked, almost unconsciously, the whiteness of the face and the supplication of the soft, blue eyes that looked in at her. This did not seem a rival, but only a worn-out, dying woman, asking shelter from the cold.

"Will you let me come in?"

The words were spoken with a foreign accent. The voice was piteous and weak.

"No," said Petrina, firmly. "You have no right here. Go away."

"I can't," came the reply, faintly. "I have no place to go. I have walked all the way from Boston. I have eaten nothing since morning. Please let me come in."

"Go away; go away," Petrina insisted.

"I am so cold."

"Go away; go away."

"This is my husband's house. Let me come in."

Petrina was mad with fear. If Lechmere were to come, all would be lost.

"Go away," she repeated. "You will never come in here—never—never."

The woman staggered back against a pillar.

"I know I haven't any right," she pleaded. "I've been a bad woman. But I'm so cold and sick."

"Go, go, go!" cried Petrina, wildly, and closed the door.

A weak wail like a baby's came from outside, but Petrina fled from its sound.

The servants were gone. She was alone. Was the woman still at the door? Would she stay there? Petrina ran to the window of a dark room and looked

out. A convulsive sob rose to her throat. Felicia had turned away. Her dark figure could be seen slowly going down the steps. The wind blew her thin cloak around her. When she reached the snow she shrank back and almost fell. But she staggered on, dragging herself painfully. Petrina, racked by tearless sobs, continued looking out. Felicia began to descend the avenue, between the leafless trees. Each time she tottered Petrina stifled a moan of horror. At last she could bear no more.

"I must bring her back, I must bring her back," she cried, and sprang from the window.

She did not stop to consider what she should do. She was beyond all control of reason. She flung open the hall door and rushed out into the snow calling, "Felicia! Felicia! Felicia!"

The wind caught her voice and carried it away. The dark figure, struggling on amid the snow-drifts, did not turn.

"Felicia! Felicia!" Petrina called again, as she, too, toiled on. The snow beat upon her uncovered shoulders; the wind tore at her hair; the diamonds around her neck became like points of ice. But she heeded nothing in her desire to reach the frail creature, staggering on blindly through the storm.

Then Petrina uttered a loud cry. Felicia fell and did not rise again. What did it mean? Was it a faint? Or was it death? She called no more. She herself was growing weak; but she battled on, with the one thought of reaching the dark spot lying in the middle of the white roadway. It was not far, but it took her long.

"Felicia! Felicia!" she cried as she drew near; but there was no reply.

The woman was lying face downwards. Even in

those few minutes the snow had already begun drifting over her. Petrina sank down beside her, and lifted her in her arms.

"Felicia! Felicia!" she murmured. "It is I—Petrina. I want to take you back."

The woman moaned when she was moved, but did not open her eyes. At least she was living, and that was much. Petrina tried to lift her, but found she had not the strength. She was desperate.

"Oh, wake up, wake up!" she pleaded. "Can't you stand? Can't you do anything? I want to take you back."

Again the woman only moaned, as Petrina put forth all her strength to raise her.

"What am I to do?" Petrina cried, helplessly. She looked up at the house where the lights were burning cheerfully, but no one seemed to know that she had gone outside. She called for help, but her voice could not surmount the surging of the wind among the trees. She sank again into the snow, with the head of the unconscious woman in her lap.

Still indifferent to her own exposure, Petrina began to chafe Felicia's hands, and use such other means as she knew, for bringing her back to life again; but beyond an intermittent moan there was no result.

She called again more loudly than before, but the cry only passed away on the wind like a troubled spirit's wail.

"I can't leave her here," she said to herself. "She might die while I was running for aid. I must drag her there."

She rose again and put forth all her strength, but uselessly. The dead weight of the woman was too much, and, after a few steps, Petrina dropped breathless beside her charge. She was beginning to feel the

cold herself. When her mind awaked to it she found it terrible.

"Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?" she moaned, as she chafed Felicia's inert hands.

Just then she saw two lights approaching, far down the avenue.

"Dick!" she cried. "Dick!"

She scarcely knew whether she was glad or sorry. It was enough for the moment that he should be coming. Her effort to drag Felicia had removed them from the centre of the road to the side, and they were thus in no danger of being trodden on. She sat quite still, chafing all the while Felicia's hands, and watching the carriage lamps, like two eyes of red fire, grow larger and nearer. Presently their light lit up the roadside; now it was on themselves.

"Dick! Dick!" she cried, but again her voice made but a feeble sound against the soughing wind.

The horse shied as he caught sight of the strange group in the snow.

"Dick! Dick!" she cried again, and this time he heard.

"Yes," he answered quickly. "Who's there?"

He stopped the horse and peered towards the roadside.

"My God!" he cried, when he saw Petrina crouching in the show. He threw the reins to the servant who was with him, and leaped to the ground.

"Oh, Dick! Oh, Dick!" was all she could say.

"What is it, Petrina? What are you doing there? What's that in your lap? Is it a woman? Is it a man?'

"Stoop and see, Dick."

The horse turned slightly so that the full light of a carriage lamp fell on the women. Lechmere stooped. The sight of the one wife with her head pillowed in the lap of the other seemed too much for his senses to take

in. For a long second he stood as one dazed; and then, with a loud cry, he, too, sank beside them in the snow.

"O my beloved! O my beloved!" he cried, clasping Felicia in his arms. "I've found you at last. You were coming to me. You were coming home."

He kissed her cold lips passionately, and the woman moaned again.

It was Petrina who recovered herself first.

"We must not stay here," she said, with a quietness in strange contrast with her excitement of a few minutes before. "We must take her in. Get up, Dick. You must lift her into the carriage. I will get in and hold her. You and the man can walk."

All at once she found herself calm. Dick and Felicia had met, and the worst was over. For anything there might be to come she felt the supreme courage of despair.

CHAPTER VI

It was Petrina herself who, with the aid of two of the women of the house, undressed Felicia and laid her in a bed. Petrina had some knowledge of nursing, and her alert common-sense suggested simple aids. Before the doctor came she had restored Felicia to consciousness, and had given her food and brandy.

"Go and tell Mr. Lechmere to come," she whispered to one of the women. When he arrived she sent both the servants from the room, while she stood back from the bed. Felicia, for the moment, was lying warm and still. The stimulant had brought a slight flush to her thin cheek. Lechmere, not to startle her, stood at a distance. She opened her eyes and closed them again. She was like a child that has just waked from sleep and lies a minute in quiet enjoyment of his physical well-being. Petrina kept back in the shadow. Lechmere crept forward on tip-toe, inch by inch.

Felicia opened her eyes again and looked around her. There was no surprise or wonder in her gaze. She seemed satisfied to have found warmth and comfort. Lechmere grew bolder, and stood forward in the light. When her eyes fell upon him a half-smile flickered about her lips.

"*Tiens! C'est toi?*" she said, carelessly, as if she had seen him yesterday. "*D'où viens-tu?*"

Lechmere knelt down beside the bed, and, taking the thin hand that lay outside the coverlet, pressed it to his lips.

"Don't excite her," Petrina whispered, but the sound caught Felicia's ear.

"Is there any one there?" she asked, brusquely, turning her head towards the corner where Petrina stood.

"Only some one who will take care of you, darling," Lechmere replied.

"Let me see her," Felicia demanded.

"Not now; when you are stronger."

"Let me see her, I tell you," Felicia insisted, speaking in the loud, coarse voice of the French actress, liable to sudden rage. "I will see her. I will have no people hiding in the corners of my room."

It was better to appease her. Petrina came slowly forward to the light and stood beside the bed. She was still in the shimmering black dinner-dress. The diamond stars were blazing on her breast and the collar about her neck. Since they had borne their burden into the house she had had no time to think of herself. Besides, she was very strong. She knew the exposure of the storm would do her no great harm. She and Felicia looked at one another.

"I remember her," the Frenchwoman said, quietly. "I've seen her somewhere before. Let me see. Wasn't it in London? Yes, yes; with Lady de Bohun. You remember her, don't you, Dick? a little woman, *pas laide;* Humphrey de Bohun's wife. *Quel noceur que cet Humphrey! C'est lui qui m'a donné mon collier de saphirs, après une petite noce chez—*"

"Hush, dear, hush," Lechmere whispered. "Let us not talk of those things."

"*Ah oui,*" Felicia went on, looking up at Petrina. "I remember. It was she who drove me from your door this afternoon. You didn't know that, did you, Dick? I was cold—oh, so cold! so cold! But she wouldn't

let me enter. She said, 'Go, go, go!' and shut the door upon me."

"Is this true?" Lechmere asked, glancing up keenly at Petrina.

"Yes," she answered quietly, returning his gaze.

"You turned away—my wife?"

Petrina blanched at the word, and hesitated.

"Yes," she said at last.

"Into the snow?"

"Yes."

"To die?"

Petrina hesitated again.

"Yes," she forced herself to say.

"*Eh bien! Tu vois?*" said Felicia, with a little air of triumph. "*Quelle gueuse, n'est-ce pas? Et tu vas garder ça? Mais non, Dick, non. Il faut qu'elle fiche le camp, et bien vite. C'est moi qui te le dis.*"

Petrina turned away slowly and withdrew into the shadow of the room. She felt no resentment against this poor, pitiful woman. As to Lechmere, all her feeling had died out. If she was conscious of anything, it was of a wild satisfaction that the tie by which she had attached herself had been broken by main force. The mockery of the marriage between herself and him was at an end. She had tried to be true to it, but now she need try no more. This woman had come, and he had claimed her. He had called her his wife. Be it so. She, Petrina, would call Harry Vassall husband. Clearer now than at any moment since she had owned her love for him, she knew how strong the bond between them was. So she stood back in the shadow, listening indifferently to the broken whispers which reached her from the bedside. Felicia was half delirious from weakness, Lechmere from joy. They either ignored her presence or forgot that she was there.

"Who is this woman, Dick?" Petrina heard Felicia ask.

"A friend, dearest," Lechmere replied. "But let us not talk of her. Tell me about yourself."

"But her name? What is her name?"

"Why should you ask, my beloved? Are we not together? Isn't that enough?"

"Ah! It comes back to me. She is that Madame Vassall, is she not?"

"Yes, dear. But—"

"She is not your wife?"

"Don't let us talk about other people, darling. Let us think only about ourselves."

"She is not your wife? Say so. *Elle n'est pas ta femme?*"

She grew excited, and tossed her head wildly from side to side. The fair hair, her one remaining glory, slipped from its coil, and fell in disordered, wavy masses on the pillow.

"Don't, dear, don't," Lechmere began soothingly; but she started up with a quick, angry scream.

"*Oui; elle est ta femme!*" she cried, gnashing her teeth upon the words. "She is your wife! She is your wife! You will not say no!" she screamed again, writhing under the white coverlet.

"For God's sake, calm yourself, dearest!" Lechmere said, coaxingly. "We will talk of all these things when you are better."

"*Ah, lâche, lâche, lâche!*" she shrieked with renewed violence, raising herself as she spoke. "She is your wife. *Que je suis malheureuse!*"

"Calm yourself, madame!" said Petrina, sternly, coming forward once more from the shadow and standing beside the bed. "I am not his wife."

Lechmere, who was kneeling, sprang to his feet.

The woman, appeased as suddenly as she had been angered, sank back upon the pillows.

"And who, then, is his wife?" she asked, tranquilly.

"You," said Petrina, scornfully, and again turned away.

Felicia laughed lightly.

"*C'est ça,* Dick. I am your wife. I have come back to you, after all. I shall never leave you any more. You will take a theatre for me, *n'est-ce pas?* and we shall show the critics, *ces sacrés cochons,* whether or not I am a great prima donna."

She laughed again, and presently began to sing. It was a snatch of Ophelia's air from the mad scene in "Hamlet." The voice was true, but the notes came out faintly, as though all strength were gone.

> "Pâle et blonde dort sous l'eau profonde
> La Willis au regard de feu."

Petrina and Lechmere listened breathless. There was something weird in the plaintive Danish air sung by a woman who seemed dying. "*La-la, la-la-la-la!*" Felicia went on, and ended with Ophelia's pretty, mindless laugh.

She had just ceased when the doctor was announced. Petrina left the room, and, going into the large, square hall, threw herself wearily into an arm-chair. She felt indifferent to everything. She would spend the night under Lechmere's roof—there was no help for that now—but in the morning she would escape. Her whole soul revolted against him. She had clung to such protection as his name could give her; but, after what had occurred to-night, her one desire was to be gone. She was forming no plans; she was only waiting for the daylight in order to go forth again, alone but free.

And yet she began to be aware of a possible consolation that might be open to her. If she needed a friend, she knew there was one who would stand by her and nurse her beaten spirit back to health again. It was not Vassall, but his mother. The two were connected in her mind, but it was the woman's tenderness she needed now, rather than the man's. And yet Vassall himself was there. It was something to know that, even if she never did anything but lie down once at his feet and ask for pardon.

She was still pondering these things listlessly when Lechmere came forth from the bedroom, leaving the doctor and Felicia alone. He threw himself into another arm-chair.

"Well?" Petrina asked, without looking up.

"Bad."

"What does the doctor say?"

"Little yet. She has had a great shock, or rather a succession of shocks. She can't hold out. I know he thinks that it is only a matter of hours."

"You have at least the comfort of having her under your own roof."

"That's something.'

"Do you think," Petrina asked, with an effort, "that it would have been different had I allowed her to come in at first?"

She would not shirk this question. She expected from him some bitter reproach, but, to her surprise, he spoke almost apathetically.

"I don't know; perhaps; but she was spent in any case. She won't stay long now."

"I'm sorry," said Petrina, gently. He made no response to this, and she went on.

"I think I ought to explain to you why I acted so."

She waited for him to make some remark, but, as he remained silent, she continued again.

"When I married you—or, rather, when we took the step which we tried to think was marriage—"

He nodded approval of the phrase.

"—I did so for the reasons which you yourself put before me. You knew I was unhappy, and you offered me protection. For that I was grateful. I supposed that you were free to give what I was free to accept."

"And we both found ourselves mistaken."

"Yes; I saw that very soon."

"It was my fault. I should have known better. No marriage was possible between us. I led you astray. I made you think that you could become my wife, when you were, and are, another man's. I said I could become your husband, when all the while I was, and always must be, hers. I have no excuse to offer for myself, unless it is to say that I was under a delusion."

"That isn't quite the point about which I want to speak," Petrina said, with dignity. "I understand what you mean, and, if there is any blame for what we have done, I wish to share it. But at present I want to say only this. Your protection was very dear to me. Possibly I put too high a value on it. I even brought myself to think that I couldn't live without it. I thought so right up to this evening, and when your—your wife came, I knew she would take you from me. The instinct to send her away was only that by which a man kills another rather than be slain himself. I was wrong; I am sorry. That is why I went after her and tried to bring her back. I wasn't successful, and I can only ask you to forgive me."

"It doesn't matter now," Lechmere answered, in a dull tone, as though the subject did not interest him.

Petrina said no more. It was useless to talk. Un-

der the circumstances, words were futile, for there was no possible explanation on either side which would not be inadequate.

They sat in silence till the doctor came out of the bedroom; then they rose and went to meet him, eager to hear what he had to say.

"I've given her a soothing draught for the moment," he said, "but some one ought to be with her. She's very low, though she may live through the night. She seems to be a Frenchwoman."

He looked with a questioning expression at Lechmere, and Petrina thought it prudent to withdraw. Lechmere might tell him what he chose.

"I will go in and stay with her," she said. "Is there anything special that I ought to do?"

"Not now," the doctor replied. "I hope she may sleep till I return. All you can do is to keep her as quiet as possible."

But that was not easy. When Petrina approached the bed Felicia lay with closed eyes; but a feverish flush had come over her, and she stirred restlessly. Now and then she muttered unintelligibly; now and then she moaned.

The room was hot, and Petrina, sitting down by the bedside, took a fan and waved it gently over the sleeping woman. By-and-by Lechmere came in. Petrina looked up at him, but there was nothing in his face beyond an expression of desperate apathy. One might have thought that he did not care. Petrina offered to yield him her place by the bed, but he shook his head, and, softly taking another chair, sat down beside her. They could not speak. They could scarcely think. All future consideration must be deferred until the poor, vapid soul of the woman on the bed had slipped from its feeble body.

When they brought Felicia in she had looked worn-out and old. Now, as she lay sleeping, her beautiful hair waving loosely on the pillow, and fever giving color to her cheek, something of her lost loveliness returned to her. She tossed restlessly, and began again to mutter incoherently. Lechmere bent over her to catch her words.

"Oh, *les critiques! Quels sales cochons!*"

That was all, but it summed up the whole history of her fight since the days when her voice began to fail. Lechmere understood this, and the blood surged into his dark face. Petrina affected to hear nothing, and went on slowly waving the fan. By-and-by Felicia spoke again.

"*Les hommes—les hommes—saligauds—tous—tous!*"

The words were very distinctly spoken, and Petrina could see Lechmere clinch his teeth in the effort to keep his self-command.

"*Saligauds — saligauds — tous — tous!*" Felicia repeated, and then for a while lay still.

Lechmere glanced at his watch; it was after one o'clock.

"Don't you want to lie down?" he whispered to Petrina, but she shook her head. Just then Felicia woke.

She opened her eyes and gazed up at the two sitting at her bedside. Her expression was feverishly bright. They did not speak to her, hoping that she would go to sleep again. For a long minute she looked at them steadily.

"*Eh bien?*" she said, at last. "*As-tu assez de me regarder comme ça?—toi et ta maîtresse.*"

At the last word Petrina started up; but she controlled herself and resumed her place in silence. It was too late to take offence now.

Felicia gave a short laugh, and turned her head away

from them, beginning to sing once more. Some vague memory of "Faust" seemed to be passing through her mind.

"'Ah! je ris de me voir
Si belle en ce miroir.'"

The notes fluttered out weakly and with a great effort.

"And they would take that rôle away from me," she burst out, angrily, turning her face again towards Lechmere. "Paillard—you remember *ce sale* Paillard, don't you, Dick?—he would not let me sing it any more. He said I sang out of tune—I, the great Felicia de Prony, whom princes loved, *et d'amour—d'amour, mon cher Dick! Je crois bien qu'ils m'ont aimée d'amour,*" she laughed, softly, as if speaking to herself. "Ah, that was the good time, before I was ill!"

"Won't you try to sleep again, dearest?" Lechmere said, tenderly. But she paid no attention, and began to sing again—a snatch of an old French air which had been one of Lechmere's favorites during their married days:

"'Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment.
Chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie.'"

But she broke off suddenly and sighed. For a while she lay quite still, and they hoped she would sleep, but she spoke again.

"You didn't know I was in America, did you, Dick?"

"Yes, darling. That was the reason I came here."

"And you were looking for me in Europe. Jeanne Vignon, who used to be at the Comédie, told me so when I saw her in San Francisco. She said she had seen you in Naples. She was very good to me, and helped me to get back to New York. That gave me courage

to come to you when I heard you were here. I couldn't find you at first. They sent me to a woman named Vassall. She was a good woman, too. Oh, Dick, I've had a hard time, as you say in English. *J'ai beaucoup souffert—j'ai beaucoup souffert.*"

"But it's all over now, dearest."

"I hope so, Dick. You will take a theatre for me and buy up all the critics, and we shall show the world that I am Felicia de Prony. *N'est-ce pas, Dick? N'est-ce pas, mon chéri, mon vieux trésor?*"

The words of endearment, so rare from her lips, had on Lechmere all their old effect. He slipped from the chair to his knees, and, seizing her hand, covered it with kisses. Petrina rose and stole back again into the shadow, leaving them alone together.

For a long while she sat there, catching from time to time their whispers and the half-delirious snatches of song.

"Do you remember, Dick," Felicia asked, with a laugh quite light and rippling—"do you remember when we used to sing *'Nuit d'hyménée'* together, and you were always a little flat? Ah, that was the good time, the good time! Let me see—I was with Chaillot the barytone then, wasn't I? Or was it with—But I forget. *Ça me donne mal à la tête.* I never had a good memory for details. *'Nuit d'hyménée, O douce nuit d'amour!'*" she sang, and then stopped abruptly. "*Quelle jolie musique! Comme c'est beau!* I will make my *rentrée* as Juliette; it shall be in London, not New York or Paris. *'Nuit d'hyménée'* she sang again, more loudly than before, *'O douce nuit d'amour!'*" Once more she stopped and broke into a light laugh. "*Ah, c'est beau, c'est beau! n'est-ce pas, mon mari aimé, mon Dick adoré.* Let me see. Didn't you divorce me once? Yes, yes, I think—and for so little. I forget

what I did, but it wasn't much. *Comme tu as été méchant, mon cher. Mais c'est fini;* it is all over now, all over now, all over now, all—over—now."

She spoke more and more slowly, and grew dazed. Then her head sank upon her shoulder, and she seemed to be passing into unconsciousness. Lechmere started up with a quick exclamation, and Petrina came forward.

"What is it?" he whispered, terrified. "Is she—dying?"

"No," Petrina answered, firmly. "She will come out of it, I think."

She bent over Felicia and raised her. Then she moistened the woman's lips with brandy and gently bathed her forehead with cologne. Felicia lay still, but breathed heavily. It was evident that a great change had come.

"Will the doctor return soon?" Petrina asked, anxiously.

"Not before six, I think. He had to go to Boston for medicines and come back."

"I don't think she is dying," Petrina said, to encourage him. As she spoke she took up the fan again and began to wave it; Felicia breathed more easily.

"Is it unconsciousness or sleep?" Lechmere whispered.

"Sleep, I hope," she returned.

Then more than an hour went by with scarcely a word on either side. Felicia lay very quietly. At times she breathed heavily, at others more softly; there were long, fearful pauses when she did not breathe at all.

About three o'clock she woke with a start and a scream.

"Dick! Dick!" she called, loudly.



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DICK LEARNS THAT FELICIA WILL DIE AND PETRINA WONDERS WHAT THEIR FUTURE WILL BE.

"Yes, yes, dearest, I am here," he answered, throwing his arms about her.

"I am a Catholic!" she shrieked, wildly. "Bring me a priest! Bring me a priest! Oh, quick, quick! Bring me a priest! *Je meurs! je meurs!* I'm dying. I've been a bad woman! For God's sake, bring me a priest!"

"Yes, at once," said Petrina, speaking to her in French. "Be calm. Do not excite yourself. The priest will come."

She left the room hurriedly and sent for one of the men. The servants had been ordered not to go to bed, and the man came promptly. She bade him take one of the sleighs and make ready to go to town. While he was coming round to the front of the house she wrote two brief notes. The first was to the Paulist Fathers, whose mission church in Brookline was the nearest to the Meerstead. It begged them to send a priest with all speed to minister to a dying Catholic woman. The second was to Vassall, and contained but three or four lines:

"I am in great trouble. Can you come to me at the Meerstead the instant you receive this? PETRINA."

"When you have brought the priest," she said to the man, "drive directly to Cambridge and deliver this. Wait for Mr. Vassall and bring him back. One of the other men will take the Father home."

She returned to the sick-room, and, entering softly, once more withdrew into the dim corner. Neither Lechmere nor Felicia seemed to notice her return. They were again whispering together, but Felicia's tone was changed. The slight delirium had passed away, and she was able to take account of her condition.

"Oh, Dick," she cried, hoarsely, clinging to him with both arms. "I'm afraid! I'm afraid! I've been a bad woman. I've done much harm. I have ruined people's lives. Now I've reached the end of all. I am like Faust when Mephistopheles comes to carry him away. All the wine is drunk; all the pleasure is sucked out. There is nothing left for me but to go—go—go—where, Dick, where? Oh, Dick, must I die? Can't you save me? Save me! do save me! I know you can if you only will. But you were always revengeful. You divorced me because I went off with the Duc de Ruynes—just for three days. And now you would let me die because—because of all the rest. Oh, save me, save me, save me! Don't let me die! I'm afraid!"

He held her tightly to his heart, kissing her mouth, her eyes, her hair, but unable to say a word to comfort her. For a while she lay silent, her head pillowed on his shoulder.

"Why doesn't the priest come?" she cried at last. "Has that woman sent for him?"

"Yes," Petrina answered, stepping forward. "Be patient, madame. He will soon be here."

"Have you a rosary?" Felicia asked, suddenly. "I've lost mine, my pretty ruby one. It went with the other things. *Ce sale Arménien me l'a volé.* No, I sold it—after I broke down at La Potinière. It was precisely Guy de Ruynes who gave it to me, after— But I forget. It was a fancy of mine. Oh, if I had a rosary I could pray."

"I will get you one," said Petrina, slipping out of the room. Presently she returned with it; she had borrowed it from a servant.

Felicia seized it eagerly and began her prayers at once:

"'*Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum; benedicta*

tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus. Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen.'"

She repeated the words rapidly for a few minutes, but grew tired.

"You say it, Dick," she said, wearily, handing him the beads. "Say it for me. *Le bon Dieu* will understand."

"I can't, dearest," he stammered. "I don't know how."

"*C'est vrai, c'est vrai.* You are not a Catholic. Be converted, Dick. Let me convert you. I shall have saved a soul, after all those which I have ruined; and perhaps it will be laid to my account. Be a Catholic, Dick, dear Dick, for my sake. Let us go into the same heaven. If I go, then come after me. Be a Catholic."

In her voice there was that caressing tone to which he could refuse nothing.

"I have long meant to become one," he answered, quietly. "I will do so now."

"And when the priest comes he will baptize you; *n'est-ce pas, cher trésor?*"

"*Oui, mon adorée, oui.*"

"Who knows?" she said, in another tone. "Perhaps that will make me well."

It was five when the priest arrived. Felicia made her confession and received Extreme Unction. Lechmere and Petrina during that time remained in the hall outside the bedroom, as they had done during the doctor's visit. They spoke little — nothing but what was necessary. There were many things that Petrina would have been glad to say, but Lechmere seemed beyond the reach of her words. When he was not with Felicia he sank into stupor. There were minutes

when Petrina feared that his mind was breaking down beneath the strain.

It was nearly six when the priest opened the door and they were allowed to enter again. They went all three to the bedside, where Felicia lay, just living. A new change had come over her; she was going fast.

"You will be baptized?" she said, faintly, looking up at Lechmere with the dawning of a smile.

"Yes, dearest."

"Now?"

"Now."

A look of satisfaction came over her face, and Lechmere turned to the priest.

"I wish to become a Catholic, sir," he said, gravely. "I ask you to baptize me."

The priest hesitated.

"Without preparation, it would be irregular."

"My preparation has been made long ago. This would be only the fulfilment of an intention I have cherished for years. As you see, my wife is dying. I wish to be baptized in her presence before the end."

The priest was a young man, and easily overborne. After a few questions to Lechmere he consented.

"I must have water," he said, turning to Petrina.

"I will bring it," she answered, and left the room.

In a few minutes she returned, bearing in her hands the beautiful golden bowl. She herself held it for the priest's convenience. Lechmere knelt while the sanctified water was poured three times upon his head.

The service was soon over, and the priest withdrew.

Petrina accompanied him to the door and thanked him. The pale winter dawn was breaking.

When she returned to the bedroom Lechmere was still kneeling; Felicia lay motionless, gazing upward. Petrina stood a moment on the threshold, hesitating to

go in. All at once Felicia raised herself. She lifted her hands, and over her face there broke a smile of exaltation. Then she began to sing—it was Marguerite's last prayer in prison, more familiar to the dying actress than the "Ave Maria" or the "Pater Noster."

"'Mon Dieu, protégez-moi !—Mon Dieu, je vous implore !'"

Her voice was weak at first, and then burst forth strongly.

"Anges purs! anges radieux,
Portez mon âme au sein des cieux!
Dieu juste, à toi je m'abandonne!
Dieu bon, je suis à toi—pardonne!"

She fell back upon the pillows. It was the only hymn of triumph to which her poor, half-heathen spirit could aspire.

Lechmere remained kneeling. Petrina drew back and closed the door softly. There was no sick woman to need her ministrations now.

She staggered wearily to one of the arm-chairs and threw herself into it. She would not go to her room, for Lechmere would come out by-and-by and might need her. She was very tired, but her task was not finished yet. She would carry it through to the end and then—go. Through the night vague plans had been maturing. She saw dimly what she meant to do.

Just now she was too tired to think of anything clearly. She could only sit still and wait for her last words with Lechmere.

But she was not to have them. Suddenly there rang through the house that loud, sharp report which is like no other, and which causes the heart of the hearer to stop still.

Petrina leaped to her feet with an awful cry, and then sank back into her chair again. Up the stairway there was coming breathlessly—Harry Vassall.

"Where? Where?" he cried.

She could only point to the bedroom. He rushed to the door and threw it open. As he did so, a faint cloud of smoke rolled out.

Vassall stood on the threshold and looked in. Felicia was lying with calm, white, upturned face, her fair hair waving over the pillows. By the bedside Lechmere had fallen, with his cheek resting on her hand. The weapon, which had dropped from him, had overturned the golden bowl, and the baptismal water was mingling with his blood.

CHAPTER VII

THE doctor came and went. He and Vassall did what was needful in the chamber of death. Petrina would not move from her station in the hall. The women begged her to come away, to lie down, to take some refreshment, or at the very least to change her dress. But she could not drag herself from the spot. She allowed them to throw a shawl over her shoulders, hiding their whiteness and the icy glimmer of the diamonds; but that was all. Vassall was within, busy with his silent task, and she would wait for him. After the first shriek of terror she had remained calm. So much had happened in so brief a time that now, it seemed to her, she could bear any disaster without breaking down. When the doctor came out she rose and thanked him for his kindnesses; she could do it without effort; she was quite herself. When he left she sat down again, to wait for Vassall.

The sun was high when, at last, he opened the door. She rose as he advanced towards her. During the few seconds before he spoke she noticed that he was thinner and more gray than when she had last seen him. His expression, always ascetic, had grown spiritualized through suffering; while the marked stoop with which he walked was typical of the man who is no longer thinking much of this world's lighter things.

"All is ready now," he said, with gentle gravity. He stood at a little distance, and scarcely lifted his eyes to hers.

"May I go in?"

"Do you think you can bear it?"

"I ought to do so. It will be easier if you are there."

He led the way, and she followed him. On the threshold he stepped aside so that she entered first. The sight did not appal her, but its solemnity was overwhelming. The daylight, streaming broadly in, turned into reality that which, in the lamplight of the night's vigil, had passed weirdly, like a dream.

Felicia lay almost as Petrina had last seen her; they had placed Lechmere on a couch beside her bed. His face was quite serene; there was nothing visible that could recall the awfulness of his last act.

Petrina moved slowly forward, and stood looking from one to the other of her last night's companions.

What she felt chiefly was the peace which seemed to have descended where there had been only suffering and sin. Death announced his presence less as a foe than as a healer. In Lechmere's face the expression was not of sleep, but of content. Felicia appeared to have grown younger. She had regained in death that pale, modest loveliness which had always been in such strange contrast to her character.

Petrina stood there long—alone and silent. She was not grieving; she was not meditating; she was only letting her spirit be stamped with the impressions it was always to bear in later life. After a time she heard Vassall approach, and was glad to have him there; she rested upon his presence, but her thoughts were with those who had gone away. A half-hour passed, and still they stood silent, side by side.

"In death they were not divided."

It was Petrina who spoke the words. She uttered them involuntarily, but the sound of her voice brought them both back to themselves.

"In death," said Vassall, quietly, "many are united who have been divided in life."

She turned towards him, and, for the first time since he had come into the house, their eyes met. They looked at each other earnestly, sadly, and without consciousness of self.

"You believe," she asked, at last, taking her eyes from his and letting them wander from Felicia to Lechmere and back again, "you believe that when everything has gone wrong in this life it is possible for something at least to be put right in another?"

Her question had come softly; his answer went more softly still.

"I believe in a Divine Adjuster of all human errors, for whom eternity is as time."

"Could you teach me to believe that, too?"

"I could try."

Again they stood for a long while silent. The peacefulness of the two who were dead seemed to pass into the two who were still living.

"Harry," said Petrina, at last. "Do you remember that long ago I told you I did not believe in sin? I have come to know better. I myself have sinned. I have sinned against you—against him—against her. If there is this Divine Adjuster of whom you speak I have sinned against Him, too. I want to work out my forgiveness. I don't know what I ought to do or how I should begin; that I shall learn in time. But to-day I wish only to tell you that this intention will hereafter rule my life. And, Harry," she added, turning again to look him in the eyes, "I want you to help me. I don't ask you to forgive me. Some day when I merit it I know you will do so. I don't deserve forgiveness yet; but I am going to try to earn it."

"It is I who ought to speak like that," he said, hum-

bly. "If you have made mistakes, it is I who drove you into them."

"I don't say you are right, but if you feel so I have the more courage in asking you to do me a great favor."

"Nothing is a favor that you could ask."

"Will you let me go to your house in Cambridge? No, no," she added, hastily, as she saw the look in his face, "not as you wished me to go before, not as its mistress—no, Harry, no—after the past that isn't possible. I am going to ask you to leave it and go to mine—to the house that was ours in Beacon Street. But let me stay for a while under your roof, amid your surroundings and with your mother. I want to be near her. I've suffered a great deal. I've been scourged to the very bone. I want now to be comforted with another woman's sympathy. You will be near me; I shall see you sometimes—often perhaps; but I want to learn from her. She will give me what I could never get from any one else. She will help me, teach me, and heal me. Oh, Harry, I've been a wicked woman; but I mean to begin all over again. I want to get my first lessons from the source whence you had yours. I shall be very humble; I shall start very low down; but some day I may rise. I've done with the world. I don't care for it any more. But if—after all I've suffered—I could help some other poor woman to escape the snares into which I have fallen, I think I could live for that. Your mother could show me how. She's been so good to me. If she would take me—if you would let me go—if I could learn what you both know—if I could do anything, however small, for some one else—then perhaps, oh! long years from now, I might atone for being here to-day—for ever having been anywhere, Harry, except with you."

She spoke quite calmly, and when she ceased her eyes still looked into his.

"You needn't answer me now," she added, seeing that he said nothing.

"I cannot speak for shame," was all he could reply.

Dropping on one knee, he seized the hem of her long black robe and pressed it to his lips. As he knelt, she let her hand rest for an instant on his head. Before he had risen she turned away and slowly left the room.

As she passed into the hall, a small, frail figure in black came with outstretched hands towards her.

"I couldn't help coming, dear," Mrs. Vassall murmured. "Harry told me you were in trouble, and I knew my place was here."

"Oh, mother, mother, take me home!" Petrina cried and clasped the trembling little woman in her arms.

THE END

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